University of Alberta

Fictions of British Decadence

by

Kirsten Jessica Gordon MacLeod ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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To Enoch Soames

ABSTRACT: Fictions of British Decadence

This dissertation examines the material conditions that shaped the production and reception of decadence within the British context and considers the role played by decadents, other writers among the literary élite, popular writers, critics, reviewers, and journalists in the construction of ideas about decadence. I call these representations of decadence "fictions" in order to emphasize their constructedness, the way in which a variety of meanings, often contradictory, circulated around the term decadence. I argue that these competing "fictions" functioned strategically in debates about aesthetics, ethics, and high and low art as writers battled for cultural authority within the literary field. For example, while decadents aligned themselves with aristocratic culture and represented decadence as an élite masculine literary discourse, their opponents aligned decadents with the working class and represented decadence as an effeminate sensationalizing, popular discourse. In the first part of the dissertation, I trace the emergence of competing class "fictions" of decadence to tensions within the professional middle-class socio-cultural milieu in which the decadent writer was bred. In addition, I evaluate competing fictions of decadence within the literary field as decadents attempted to assert their authority while counter-decadents sought to undermine it by aligning decadence with the popular. In the second part of the dissertation I turn to fiction itself, examining how decadence is constructed in both popular and decadent fiction and in the critical reception of this fiction. The chapters of this section take up works by Vernon Lee, George Moore, Marie Corelli, Sarah Grand, Robert Hichens, Ernest Dowson, John Davidson, Arthur Machen, and M. P. Shiel. The final part of the dissertation discusses the impact of the Wilde trials on decadence and its practitioners, traces the post-1895 careers of the decadents as they engaged with the literary fields of the Edwardian and Modernist periods, and re-evaluates the status of decadence in the Modernist period. In the process of examining the uses to which decadence was put in the *fin de siècle*, the dissertation challenges some of the central myths of decadence, notably the status of decadence as an élite high art form and the myth of the "tragic generation."

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Introduction to Fictions of British Decadence

I

Mapping the Critical Terrain

Studies of British literary decadence confront two problems at the outset: the problem of meaning and the problem of myth. Broadly speaking, as a definition that both proponents and detractors of decadence as well as literary critics would agree on, decadence is an aesthetic interested in the exploration of abnormal psychology. It is characterized by a self-consciousness that borders on artificiality and a preciousness of style that also, at times, borders on the artificial. Furthermore, decadence opposes itself to the values and beliefs of dominant culture. But here consensus pretty well ends. The problem of meaning begins with the term decadence itself, a problem that has repercussions for its manifestation in literature. "Decadence," as Richard Gilman argues, has a "purely negative . . . existence. It emerges as the underside or logical complement of something else, coerced into taking its place in our vocabularies by the pressure of something that needs an opposite, an enemy. Decadence is a scarecrow, a bogy, a red herring" (159). Or, as David Weir argues, decadence is "a decline from or opposition to arbitrarily defined norms. This relationship to some normative position is significant to the definition of decadence" (10-11). Because decadence is predicated on its relation to a norm of some kind, the naming of something as decadent is "a value judgment, a category of belief or opinion" rather than "a fact" (Gilman 129). Depending on what position or norm you are speaking from, what values and beliefs you hold, and what you regard as an opposite or enemy position, decadence can look very different.

As a result, decadence has taken on a number of contradictory meanings imposed both by its proponents and detractors in the *fin de siècle* period as well as by more recent literary and cultural critics of decadence. Decadence has been described as both derivative and innovative; as backward-looking and as forward-looking; as indicative of a moribund literature and society and as a literature of youth and renewal; as primitive and degenerative and as over-civilised and over-refined; as a continuation of romanticism and as a reaction against romanticism; as an avant-garde art form and as a popular bourgeois cultural form; as an effeminate aesthetic and as a masculine misogynistic aesthetic; as reactionary and as radical; as introspective and as socially engaged; as aristocratic and as middle class; as fascist and as socialist; as predominantly concerned with style and as predominantly concerned with content and subject matter, and so on.[1]

To give a sense of the way some of these contradictions have coloured histories of decadence, I will focus on their manifestation in some recent criticism. That decadence is a derivative, inferior literary form has frequently been argued in studies of decadence. As Liz Constable, Matthew Potolsky and Dennis Denisoff argue in the introduction to *Perennial Decay* (1999), an anthology of essays on decadence, "[c]ritics tend to treat decadence . . . as the weak other of some 'strong' literary movement, distinguishing the (good) Aesthetes from the (bad) decadents, the (transcendent) Symbolists from the (materialistic) decadents, or the (original) Romantics from the (imitative) decadents who merely parrot or plagiarize their imagery and doctrines" (7-8). I would add to this list, the (strong) modernists as distinguished from the "muzzy" (to use Ezra Pound's description) decadents. Regenia Gagnier, for example, has made an argument in favour of the good aesthete/bad decadent dichotomy in "A Critique of Practical Aesthetics" (1994). While she sees the aesthetes as promoting a liberatory aesthetics which is public, erotic, active, dialogic and which inverts middle-class language and life, she characterizes the decadent aesthetic as paranoid, fearful, autonomous, conservative, and reactionary (270-76). Similarly, R. K. R. Thornton has characterized decadence as the bad "other" of the symbolists. The decadents failed, argues Thornton, to solve the dilemma of being "caught between two opposite and apparently incompatible pulls," between "the world" or the real and the "ideal and unworldly" ("Decadence" 26). Symbolism, by contrast, "solved this dilemma . . . demonstrat[ing] that real and ideal were not separate but united in the symbol" (*Decadent Dilemma* 200). By Thornton's account, decadence is important primarily "for its place in literary history in its nurturing of Symbolism" (*Decadent Dilemma* 200). Similar kinds of arguments have been made regarding the literary inferiority of decadence in relation to romanticism and to modernism, where decadence, in a kind of progressive history of literary development, is almost always doomed to suffer a lesser status as a precursor of a more developed form.

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[1] In *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, David Weir provides an exhaustive account of some of these contradictory deployments of the term decadence in decadent criticism (2-13). Others have been discussed by Constable, Potolsky and Denisoff in the introduction to *Perennial Decay*, an essay which questions some of the main critical assumptions about decadence found in the criticism of the past hundred or so years.

This analysis of the derivative and ultimately inferior quality of decadence has been countered in a number of ways by critics who regard decadence as innovative, forward-looking, radical, and socially engaged. In contrast to Gagnier's sense that decadence has put an end to liberatory aesthetics, critics like Jonathan Dollimore, Cassandra Laity, Bridget Elliot and Jo-Ann Wallace, and Richard Dellamora have argued that the decadent aesthetic provided a means for constructing and exploring sub-cultural sexual identities for writers like Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater and for modernist women artists like H. D., Natalie Barney, Romaine Brooks, and Djuna Barnes.[2] Peter Nicholls has made a similar claim, arguing that the decadent aesthetic represents an alternative means of self-representation that contrasts a male high modernist notion of a coherent self with a more fluid sense of identity explored in the works of writers like H. D. and Gertrude Stein. For these critics, decadence is a socially progressive aesthetic in terms of gender, sexuality and notions of female self-hood.

That decadence is radical in other than gendered and sexual terms is argued by John Goode in "The Decadent Writer as Producer" (1983). Goode sees decadence as a theory of production that contradicts the ideology demanded by the market by undermining coherent structures and working against notions of the absolute. In this respect he sees decadence as superior to modernism, a totalizing aesthetic that, as he argues, colluded with capitalist ideology. For Dowling, decadent stylistics represents a serious attempt at creating a counterpoetics and critique in a moment of linguistic crisis, while for John Reed the progressive potential of decadence lies in its ability to thwart expectations thereby forcing an intellectual engagement on the part of the reader (Dowling, *Language* ix-xi; Reed 18). Constable, Potolsky, and Denisoff argue for a more generalized notion of the progressive, transgressive, and radical potential of decadence, drawing attention to the way in which its textual strategies "interfere with boundaries and borders (national, sexual, definitional, historical to name but a few)" and the way that "decadent texts . . . question the interpretive validity of their own claims" (11, 25).

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[2] Dollimore uses the term "transgressive aesthetic," rather than decadent aesthetic. Nonetheless, his study centres on elements central to decadence including paradox, perversity, and individualism.

While decadence has fared well as a progressive/transgressive aesthetic for critics approaching decadence from the point of view of Marxist, linguistic, and lesbian and gay studies, the same cannot be said for its status in feminist studies. These studies have been largely concerned with the apparent contradiction between notions of decadence as an exclusively male aesthetic and its status as an apparently feminized aesthetic. One of the ways that feminist critics have attempted to address this contradiction is by attempting to locate instances of female decadent writing. Collections of women's writing of this period such as Elaine Showalter's *Daughters of Decadence* (1993) have been instrumental in the first stages of such an inquiry in that they make readily available material that is otherwise difficult to come by. Until recently, Vernon Lee has attracted the most critical attention as a potentially decadent woman writer (Susan J. Navarette, Jean de Palacio, Kathy Psomiades, and Ruth Robbins). A recent anthology of essays entitled *Women and British Aestheticism* (1999), however, broadly extends the examination of *fin de siècle* women writers engaging with decadence to include Sarah Grand (in an essay by Lisa K. Hamilton), Marie Corelli (in an essay by Annette Federico), Ada Leverson (in an essay by Margaret Debelius), Graham R. Thomson (in an essay by Linda K. Hughes), and Sarojini Naidu (in an essay by Edward Marx). In addition, a number of critics have explored the relationship between New Woman writing and decadence (Dowling ["The Decadent"], Showalter, Theresa Mangum, and Sally Ledger).

With some exceptions, feminist critics generally concur that decadence was indeed a masculine aesthetic deliberately constructed to exclude women. Where women writers do engage with decadence, generally they do so in a way that re-writes or feminizes decadence for their purposes. That decadence is an inherently masculine and misogynistic aesthetic is further indicated, critics note, by the manner in which decadents take on the feminine. The appropriation of effeminate and feminine qualities in the construction of some decadents' self-identity did not amount, argue many critics, to a declaration of solidarity with women. On the contrary, as Rita Felski argues in *The Gender of Modernity* (1995), "the [decadent's] playful subversion of gender norms and adoption of feminine traits paradoxically reinforce his distance from and superiority to women, whose nature renders them incapable of this kind of free-floating semiotic mobility and aesthetic sophistication" (106). The decadent assumption of feminine attributes was part and parcel of the rebellion against middle-class patriarchal consumer culture. To the decadents, this line of argument runs, women represented the worst aspects of both culture and nature, "exemplifying the crass vulgarity and emptiness of modern bourgeois society" and the "uncontrolled and excessive emotionality that is deeply repugnant to the disengaged stance of the male aesthete" (Felski 107).

These examples of critical approaches to decadence give some sense of the varied and contradictory ways in which it is regarded and why the attempt to define decadence has been a central feature of the literary criticism. Decadence is, in many respects, an empty term, "a word chosen to fill a space," a word whose meaning is only "determined by the word to which it is opposed" (Gilman 159, Weir 13). The critics that I have discussed have mobilized the term for specific purposes to serve feminist, Marxist, gay and lesbian, and other critical agendas. This inherent fluidity of the term and the ease with which it can be mobilized to serve various agendas, has been taken up by recent critics as an element of central importance in understanding decadence.

Recent critics have thus approached the problem of definition not through a continuing intervention in the attempts to define decadence but rather by accepting decadence as an unstable referent and stepping back to consider *why* there are so many definitions at odds with one another.[3] This kind of approach, rather than focusing on meanings of decadence--meanings which are clearly multiple, variable and often contradictory--focuses on its *uses*.[4] As my survey of some of the central criticism on decadence has shown, decadence has particular uses in particular contexts. If decadence was a useful transgressive and radical aesthetic for modernist lesbian women writers, it was not for women contemporaries of the decadents for whom the decadent aesthetic was often extremely problematic. Similarly, though decadence may have served as a useful way of promoting same-sex agendas for Oscar Wilde and as a homosexual discourse in twentieth-century gay studies, this use was not broadly representative among decadents of the British *fin de siècle*. Just as often, if not more often, it was used to promote a heterosexual agenda, a point that is strongly argued by Joseph Bristow in "Sterile Ecstasies: The Perversity of the Decadent Movement" (1995) as well as by Audra Himes in her dissertation "The English Decadents in the Music Hall: Taking Pleasure Sadly" (2000). So too, decadence functioned to promote a particular public form of masculine intellectual culture. The decadent dandy types found in works like George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* and Arthur Machen's *Great God Pan* are distinctly heterosexual while at the same time being distinctly anti-bourgeois in their thinking and interests.

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[3] In examining the question of "why so many critics have offered contradictory definitions of decadence, and why the word decadence contradicts its meaning with every shift in context, we might arrive at a more useful dialectical tool than 'contradiction' alone," Weir develops a notion of decadence as an "interference of ideas and literary tendencies" (13).

[4] Constable, Potolsky and Denisoff regard this focus on the uses rather than the meanings of decadence as central to the creation of a critical approach to decadence that is not dominated by the kind of value judgements that so often attach themselves to decadence. Constable, Potolsky and Denisoff are harsh in their assessment of most of the critical work on decadence in the past one hundred years which, in their view, is far too often coloured by "a barely concealed distaste and contempt for decadent writers and texts" (4). The essays in *Perennial Decay* are an attempt to establish a starting point for a re-evaluation of decadence that takes into account "the long underappreciated aesthetic and political complexity of decadent cultural phenomena" (21).

Decadence, then, has always been a term susceptible to mobilization for different purposes. Its origins as a term to apply to a literary phenomenon further demonstrate the variableness of the term. First used in its pejorative sense by critics in France to refer to certain writers, the term was then adopted by these writers as Anatole Baju, founder of the French decadent literary magazine *Le Décadent*, explained: "to avoid the damaging comments about us that this somewhat despised word might generate, and then to have done with the whole thing, we opted to take the term as our emblem" (qtd. in Constable et al. 12). In so doing, the French decadents, as Constable, Potolsky, and Denisoff argue, "shaped themselves and their works by ironizing and revaluing the judgment of their critics" (12). To critics of decadence, decadence was morbid, artificial, perverse; to the decadents who remobilized the term, it was the society revered by these critics that was decadent.

But if decadence suffers from a problem of meaning, it also suffers from a problem of myth, what Dowling calls variously the "myth of the *fin de siècle*," "the clichés of the past" and, the "rumour or gossip" that often colour histories of decadence (*Aestheticism* vii, ix; *Language* ix). Thus, while decadence has been defined in a number of contradictory ways, there are also ways in which some of these meanings have been reified, coming down to us in literary history as the givens of decadence. Chief among these reified images of decadence are the stereotypes of the decadent as upper class and, on the other hand, as bohemian, the view of decadent art as avant-garde, and the myth of the "tragic generation," the image of the decadent as a martyr-artist in love with their own martyrdom, "thirst[ing] so much for life, and for the life of the hour, that they put the cup to their lips and drained it in one deep draught" (Jackson 131). Among the various myths that abound it is this last one that is the most powerful. Decadence has been particularly susceptible to this kind of mythologization because of what Dowling calls the "series of personal disasters" that "made the 1890s synonymous with dissipation and self-destruction" (*Aestheticism* ix): the suicide of Francis Adams in 1893, the trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895 and his death in 1900, the early deaths of Aubrey Beardsley, Ernest Dowson, and Lionel Johnson (in 1898, 1900, and 1902 respectively), the mental breakdown of Arthur Symons in 1908 and the suicide of John Davidson in 1909 to name but a few. These incidents, argues Dowling, served as "the outlines of a compelling myth of heedless talent and headlong disaster" (*Aestheticism* ix).

Since 1977, when Dowling identified the mythologization of decadence and of the *fin de siècle* period as a problem for scholarship on the period, there has been a great deal of work done to dispel some of the decadent myths. In part, this work has profited enormously from a rash of cultural materialist, feminist, postcolonial, gender studies, and history of sexuality approaches to the *fin de siècle* period more generally. John Stokes's *In the Nineties* (1989), Karl Beckson's *London in the 1890s* (1992), Daniel Pick's *Faces of Degeneration* (1989), William Greenslade's *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel* (1994), Stephen Arata's *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (1996), and the essays collected in Lyn Pykett's *Reading Fin de Siècle Fictions* (1996), Sally Ledger's and Scott McCracken's *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle* (1995), and John Stokes's *Fin de Siècle/Fin du Globe* (1992) demythologize the "mauve decade" or the "naughty nineties" to create what Lyn Pykett has called "a 'new' *fin de siècle*" (Introduction 3). These studies, in turn, have paved the way for re-evaluations of decadence. Pick's, Arata's, and Greenslade's studies of the pervasiveness of discourses of degeneration in medicine, science, sociology, and in popular literature, for example, reveal a continuity between the apocalyptic and pessimistic views of the supposedly marginalized decadents and the broader culture of which they were part. All in all, these studies have done much to enrich our understanding of the immense variety of literary, social, and cultural activity in this period, making the period irreducible to the stereotypes that have been attributed to it.

In keeping with this overall re-contextualization of the period, studies of British literary decadence and aestheticism have been concerned with seeing beyond sensationalized stereotypes and myths of British decadent art and artists. Regenia Gagnier, in *Idylls of the Marketplace* (1986) and Jonathan Freedman, in *Professions of Taste* (1990), informed by the methodologies of cultural studies, have questioned the stereotype of the decadent or aesthete as avant-garde élitist. Behind his affectation of leisure and dilettantism Oscar Wilde was, as Gagnier and Freedman reveal, a professional hard-working producer fully engaged in the literary marketplace. Ian Small's and Josephine Guy's recent *Oscar Wilde's Profession* (2000), has developed this argument further, offering a detailed analysis of "the material circumstances of Wilde's literary production" including "the commissioning, the writing, and the economics of his *oeuvre*, and the power relationships between Wilde, his publishers, and his theatre managers" (v). In their study, Guy and Small not only want to challenge the myth of Wilde the aesthetic purist and socialite, they also want to recuperate important aspects of Wilde's career that they feel have been lost in recent critical studies which give emphasis to Wilde's sexuality and his nationalism (v).

Though Oscar Wilde has figured centrally in these re-examinations of decadence, there has also been excellent critical work in the areas of book and magazine history that has contributed towards a demythologization of the avant-garde status of the major organs of British decadence--the *Yellow Book* magazine and the Bodley Head publishing house. In "Sex, Lies and Printed Cloth" (1991), Margaret D. Stetz has revealed the degree to which John Lane of the Bodley Head strategically set out to render "high art" profitable, popular and commercial, while Laurel Brake has made a similar argument regarding the *Yellow Book*, also published by John Lane. Brake makes a connection between the *Yellow Book* and the sensational yellow press which was developing at this time, a press that catered to a mass readership : "*The Yellow Book*," Brake argues, was

> designed to create large readerships seeking titillation through writing which is commodified as 'news' through its notoriety. Despite its attempt to give itself weight and distance through its quarterly (in)frequency, and despite its claim to publish Literature and Art rather than journalism, much of *The Yellow Book* avails itself of the rhetoric of sensationalism, including its name, its poster-art cover, and its decision to publish in *one* volume such provocative pieces as Arthur Symons' 'Stella Maris,' Beerbohm's spoof on cosmetics, Waugh's diatribe on reticence, and Beardsley's drawings 'L'Education Sentimentale' and 'Night Piece'. ("Endgames" 59)

These explorations of the relationship between decadence and popular art forms have also coloured recent studies of the literary inheritance of decadence. Providing an alternative to literary genealogies which posit decadence as part of a high art tradition extending from romanticism through to modernism, critics like David Weir and Brian Stableford argue for a somewhat less cultivated genealogy. In *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (1996), for example, Weir traces the influence of European decadence on a bourgeois popularized American decadence that was developed by writers like James Huneker and Ben Hecht (who went on to be a major screenwriter in Hollywood). In a like manner, Stableford, in *Glorious Perversity* (1998), argues that what he calls the "decadent heritage" can be found in the twentieth-century popular and pulp genres of supernatural fiction, science fiction, horror and fantasy (124).

If much has been done to dispel the high art aura around decadence, less has been done to dispel the myth of the "tragic generation," a myth that belies the very active way in which decadents engaged in the literary field. Single-author studies, biographies, and editions of collected letters of various authors have done much to extricate their subjects from the myth. The works on Wilde, for example, by Regenia Gagnier and Ian Small and Josephine Guy, the 1987 biography of Wilde by Richard Ellmann, as well as the plethora of Wilde studies of the past twenty or so years have played a large part in evaluating the broader contours of his place in the literary and social culture of the *fin de siècle*. So too, collections of letters, like those of Ernest Dowson, edited by Desmond Flower and Henry Maas (1967), dramatically alter our understanding of Dowson, whose apparent alcoholism, dissolute lifestyle, and early death have made him one of the poster-boys of the "tragic generation." As Flower and Maas state explicitly, however, Dowson's letters provide a striking contrast to this image, demonstrating the degree to which Dowson was a social, actively engaged, ambitious and diligent writer.

But while single-author studies of decadents go a long way to complicating the received assumptions about their status among the "tragic generation," often they do so at the expense of other decadents. Thus, while they extricate their own subjects from the myth, they do little to challenge the basis of the myth itself. In his biography of John Davidson, for example, J. Benjamin Townsend distinguishes Davidson from the other decadents describing Davidson's "hedonism" as being "of a sterner, more positive and vigorous mold" than that of the decadents (185). Townsend, then, extricates Davidson from the myth only to leave the other decadents--identified as Wilde, Beardsley, Dowson, and Symons--mired in its oversimplifications. Similarly, while Regenia Gagnier's *Idylls of the Marketplace* broadens and enriches our understanding of Wilde's career, his negotiations in the literary marketplace, and his complex social and literary positioning in a manner that, as she argues, "lead[s] to a serious reconsideration of the aestheticism of the 1890s," in doing so she reinscribes the myth of the tragic generation (3). In recuperating Wilde for aestheticism, an aesthetic that, as I have already mentioned, Gagnier regards as superior to decadence, Gagnier distinguishes Wilde from those decadents of the "tragic generation" who, in her study, remain reified in myth: "the 'tragic generation' of men were either cared for by sisters, intimidated by New Women, or like Johnson, after 'four or five glasses of wine,' denied 'that a gelded man lost anything of intellectual power'" (144). Though many of the decadents were not always models of sobriety or ethical living, more personal characterizations like these need to be weighed against the ways in which these decadents of the tragic generation engaged in the literary field as well as in what Gagnier characterizes as a specifically aestheticist "protest against Victorian rationality, scientific factuality, and technological progress" in their own, but perhaps not Wilde's, ways (Gagnier, *Idylls* 3).

If Gagnier does not set about revisiting the myth of "tragic generation" in *Idylls of the Marketplace*, she does engage with the myth of the decadent as aristocrat, treating the complex nuances of class identity and allegiance as they were engaged with by decadents like Wilde. Gagnier discusses the relationship between Wilde's posing as one of the upper classes and his real status as middle class, how this relationship informed his work, and how it was received by his upper- and middle-class audiences. Part of what so offended Wilde's middle-class critics was the absence of the middle-class in his work and Wilde's assumption of a class status that was not his own. As Gagnier writes, Wilde's "decadence lay in his rejection of middle-class life. *Dorian Gray's* decadence lay in its distance from and rejection of middle-class life" (*Idylls* 65). Gagnier makes a strong claim for the importance of this aspect of decadence, a claim that is assuredly valid, when she argues, "[The rejection of middle-class life], not stylistics, is how decadence in British literature should be understood" (65). Gagnier's nuanced reading of the importance of class to an understanding of British literary decadence has influenced other work in this area including Alan Sinfield's *Wilde Century* (1994) and Jonathan Freedman's *Professions of Taste* (1990). In addition, in *Language and Decadence in the Victorian fin de siècle* (1986), Dowling has explored the interest of the decadents in culture at the other end of the social scale--the music hall, a staple of working-class culture. But more work needs to be done to understand the origins of the complex social positioning of the decadents, to bring into relation their interests in upper-class culture and working-class culture, and to consider also their construction of a bohemian identity --an identity in which their middle-class origins and their identification with both aristocratic and working-class values and ideals coalesce in the figure of this social type.

Another problem that confronts the scholar of decadence, a problem that is at once a problem of myth and a problem of meaning, is the question of whether something called British decadence ever actually existed at all. Is the notion of British decadence itself a myth? As Dowling illustrates in her analysis of the critical literature on decadence to 1977, many critics believe that decadence is not "indigenous to English literature" and few critics can "agree on what constitutes representative examples of either tendency in English" (*Aestheticism* xiii-xiv). Since Dowling's analysis, this belief has continued to influence criticism with Thornton, for example, noting that in England decadence "lack[ed] . . . a coherent group of writers who accepted the name and fought for it" (*The Decadent Dilemma* 34). Similarly, in *Decadent Style* (1985), John Reed, in an analysis of a wide array of European music, poems, fiction, and art that has been considered decadent, concludes that there were no English decadent poets and only one

English novel that might be called decadent (Wilde's *Dorian Gray*) by his definition of the term.

Compounding the problem of establishing the existence of British literary decadence is precisely the issue raised by Thornton. It is indeed difficult to find any British writer that stood consistently for decadence. Wilde's *Dorian Gray* and *Salomé* might be considered decadent, but what of his other works? Arthur Symons, an 1890s poet and theorist of decadence, renounced decadence in favour of Symbolism; Lionel Johnson and Richard Le Gallienne were both rather ambivalent in their attitude towards decadence; and George Moore's toying with literary decadence in the 1870s and 1880s--in *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888), *Mike Fletcher* (1889) and in two volumes of poetry, *Flowers of Passion* (1877) and *Pagan Poems* (1881)--would be overshadowed as he became known primarily as an advocate of realism and naturalism and later of the Irish literary revival.

This lack of a fully coherent movement or even a consistent spokesperson for decadence constitutes fairly convincing evidence against the existence of a British decadence. And yet surely this view is counter-intuitive, failing as it does to account for the pervasive decadent flavour of so much *fin de siècle* British literature and for the very real feeling on the part of many in 1890s Britain that there was indeed a decadent trend in literature. In terms of those labelled decadent who disavowed the term, we must look carefully at the context of these disavowals. Symons's disavowal, for example, along with others associated with decadence, occurred in the context of the aftermath of the Wilde trial when it became a matter of survival to disassociate oneself from the term. So too, the absence of a representative number of self-declared British decadents may be accounted for by a feeling among English admirers of French decadence that their efforts in no way matched the decadent literary activity in France. They knew, quite simply, that such work was unpublishable in England, that to adopt the term to describe themselves was risky at best, career suicide at worst, not to mention inaccurate if they felt they were not living up to a French ideal of literary decadence.

None of these explanations prove that there was no literary decadence in Britain, only perhaps that there was nothing that could be called a *movement* and that decadence in Britain differed from its French counterpart. In fact, a large part of the problem in establishing whether there was something called British decadence arises from approaching British decadence comparatively. Judged by the standard of French decadence, British decadence clearly falls far short of its Continental predecessor. As Stableford argues, "Decadence in England was but a pale shadow of French Decadence" (*Glorious Perversity* 108). There was decadence, however, even if it was only in a form that Stableford has described as "the merest shadow of" the "substance" of French decadence (*Glorious Perversity* 109), even if it was only Huysmans (or Baudelaire) "and water" to use an expression current among writers at this period to refer to works that were pale imitations or "watered down" versions of a superior writer.[5] There was no question that writers of the period were trying, in sometimes modest and cautious terms, to import elements of French decadence into English fiction.[6] There was no question, either, that many of those on the receiving end of this literary trend understood it as decadent even if there more sophisticated French counterparts would not have. *Fin de siècle* Britain indeed had its own decadence, a decadence that was conditioned by specific literary, social, and cultural forces that fostered a literature that was perceived to be decadent in its historical context.

II

British Decadence *à rebours* or, Reading Decadence Against the Grain

It is a literary decadence in these socially, culturally, and historically specific terms that this dissertation seeks to illuminate, a practice that requires what I refer to as reading "against the grain" in three senses: reading against the grain of a critical practice that seeks to determine a categorical definition of decadence; reading against the grain of received notions and myths of decadence; and reading against the grain of the some of the dominant approaches and concerns of critical work on decadence.

The first respect in which I read against the grain is by abandoning the seemingly necessary task of engaging in the search for the *meaning* of decadence and resting content with the fact that "decadence does not," as Weir argues, "have a clear and stable referent" (13). In tackling questions of definition, my critical practice is informed by the view that decadence is a term upon which multiple and often contradictory meanings have been and continue to be imposed. As such, I favour the approach proposed by Constable et al. that examines *uses* of decadence in a particular context: in this case, with a particular focus on *fin de siècle* Britain in the years from about 1884--when ideas about decadence are just beginning to emerge to 1895-- the year of the Wilde trial, an event which played a major role in shaping ideas about decadence and, with a slightly lesser degree of focus, in the years after 1895 into the Edwardian and modernist periods by which time many of the myths of decadence had taken full shape.

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[5] Dowson, for example, referred to Mabel Robinson's novels as "George Moore and water" (*Letters* 171).

[6] For the sake of clarity, I will refer, throughout this dissertation, to these writers that were attempting to transform British literature by bringing to it elements of French decadence as decadents even if they themselves did not specifically identify themselves as such.

In particular, I examine the role played by decadents, other writers among the literary élite, popular writers, critics, reviewers, journalists, and publishers in the construction of ideas about decadence. Thus, I look at fiction by decadent writers, fiction by non-decadent writers in which decadence is represented, book reviews, articles, and at the publishing practices and marketing strategies involved in the publication of decadence. The dissertation considers the ideological and cultural uses to which representations of decadence were put both by decadents as they sought to create a social and literary identity for themselves and by their proponents and opponents as they reacted to this particular social and literary type. These representations of decadence, I argue, functioned strategically for decadent writers, their proponents, and opponents in a struggle between conflicting ideologies of art in relation to the public sphere in Britain. Through these representations, a major conflict between the ideologies of high art and "popular" culture was being expressed, as decadents and their opponents battled to assert their cultural authority in a literary field increasingly marked by what Andreas Huyssen has called the "great divide" between high and mass or popular art, a divide created in the wake of technological advances and changing social conditions (vii).[7] I refer to these representations as "fictions of decadence" in order to emphasize their constructedness. These representations of decadence, after all, did not so much stand for a literary, cultural or social, "reality." Indeed, Gilman has said "that 'decadence' had no substantive meaning in England at this time, only a thin topical suggestiveness" (140). It was precisely this suggestiveness of the term and its openness to being deployed for particular polemical uses that made the term such a central part of the battle for cultural authority between writers in a divisive literary field.

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[7] My use of the term "popular" throughout this dissertation corresponds not to the inflection given the term by critics like E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams but

By its very nature, my focus on the uses of decadence and the construction of various fictions of decadence is a reading against the grain of the myths of decadence that Dowling identified in her review of the critical terrain in 1977. By looking at the uses to which decadence was put by competing factions in the British literary field of the 1890s as they constructed various "fictions of decadence," I return to the scene of origin of the myth of the decadent as aristocrat and as bohemian, the myth of decadence as élite high art, and the myth of the tragic generation, at a point in time before they had achieved their mythic status and were simply one among a variety of "fictions of decadence" in circulation. There were, for example, a number of class fictions circulating about decadence including the seemingly unlikely association of decadents with the working classes. By examining the real class origins of the decadents, the way in which decadents constructed an alternative class identity for themselves, and the way in which this identity was perceived by opponents of decadence, I complicate the myth of decadent as aristocrat and bring it in relation to another popular stereotype of the decadent as bohemian. Similarly, I complicate the myth of decadence as élite high art by examining the mutually antagonistic and reciprocally defining relationship between decadent and popular writers as they competed for cultural authority within the literary field. Finally, I challenge the myth of the tragic generation revealing it for what Dowling has called the "gorgeous and treacherous fiction" that it is (*Aestheticism* xiii). I do so by contrasting the image of the pathetic, morbid, doomed, sad, wretched and isolated stereotype decadent with that of the hard-working, ambitious, engaged (if perhaps at times somewhat self-destructive) decadent. Included in this re-evaluation are decadents normally associated with the "tragic generation"--Ernest Dowson and John Davidson--as well as two others--Arthur Machen and M. P. Shiel who bypassed the fate of the stereotype decadent, living well on

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rather to what might more accurately be referred to as something like popular middle-class culture or dominant popular culture.

into the 1940s. In my examination of these decadents' active engagement with the literary field, I show not only that the myth of the tragic generation is hardly an accurate way to characterize the decadents as a whole, but also that it is questionable even when applied to those like Dowson and Davidson, who supposedly fall under its rubric.

The reification of these aspects of decadence has overshadowed the way in which decadence was the site of an intense conflict over meaning within the British *fin de siècle* literary and cultural field as well as the way in which it was mobilized for certain strategic purposes. In addition, it overlooks the process through which certain "fictions" of decadence took precedence over others, taking their place in literary history as "truths" about decadence. The myth of decadence as avant-garde, the myth of the decadent as aristocrat, and the myth of the tragic generation obscure the fact that these issues were unsettled matters and often points of contestation in the British *fin de siècle* literary field. For example, while the decadents represented themselves as practitioners of high art thus promoting the fiction of the decadence as high art, the press and other writers in the literary field believed that the decadents were engaged in the production of a sensationalistic popular form of literature.

In the course of exploring the development of competing fictions of decadence as they were used in the British *fin de siècle* period, the dissertation, then, also reads against the grain of three of the central myths about decadence. And, while I am greatly indebted to much of the critical work that I have discussed above, I also read against this work in certain key regards, not to contest it, but rather in an effort to broaden the critical terrain of studies of literary decadence. It is this third kind of reading against the grain that has informed what is excluded from and included in my study of decadence. I have not, for example, made Oscar Wilde, who has generated so much of the criticism on decadence in the past twenty or more years, central to my study of decadence. My choice to exclude Wilde from the centre of my study is part of my effort to broaden the critical terrain or, as Dowling says, to "expand" the "cast of characters . . . beyond the stereotypical set of . . . decadents" and to see to what extent Wilde is representative of the larger group of writers participating in the production of decadence in the *fin de siècle* (*Aestheticism and Decadence* ix-x). Critical studies which position Wilde at the centre of decadence have introduced a number of useful ways of approaching other writers of decadence, but they also pose a danger of making the part speak for the whole. In many respects, Wilde's decadence was representative of the larger group of writers who took up decadence. In many other respects, however, Wilde, as the most high-profile among writers engaging with decadence, was an anomaly, quite unlike the other decadents that I will take up in the dissertation. Still, Wilde is important if only because his high-profile status coloured the way his less-famous counterparts would be received. In this respect, I think of Wilde as a presence who "haunts" my study. His importance to the way decadence was received in Britain makes him impossible to ignore, but I have decentralized him in order to give voice to other practitioners of literary decadence.

By decentralizing Wilde, my study of decadence opens up space to consider other important but neglected figures in the introduction and promotion of decadence in Britain. George Moore, for example, was one of the first to write about decadence in an article which appeared in the *Court and Society Review* in 1887. More importantly, Moore, even before Wilde, experimented with bringing decadence to the English novel, an innovation that Havelock Ellis acknowledged in his 1889 essay on decadence. Moore's achievement, however, would soon be overshadowed by Wilde's more public promotion of decadence. Moore has virtually no place in critical histories of decadence despite the fact that a number of his novels of the 1880s engage with decadence including *Confessions of a Young Man* and the lesser-known *Mike Fletcher*, a novel that critic Ian Fletcher has called "purely decadent" (*Decadence* 12). My dissertation writes Moore into the history of decadence by examining his aborted attempts, attempts that would be superseded by the taking up of decadence by Oscar Wilde, to advance the English novel through the introduction of elements of literary decadence.

My study also reads against the grain of approaches to decadence that place poetry at the centre of literary decadence in *fin de siècle* Britain. Decadence in the British context has largely been understood in literary history to have had a more pervasive influence on poetry than on fiction. If we name, for example, the central figures of decadence as represented in these histories of decadence--Oscar Wilde, Ernest Dowson, John Davidson, Arthur Symons, Richard Le Gallienne, Lionel Johnson, etc.--all, apart from Wilde, are known primarily as poets. Even Wilde only wrote one work of fiction, albeit a central one. While I would certainly not deny the centrality of poetry as an organ of decadent literary themes and styles, I would argue that its centrality is a function of its conformity to the prevailing assumption that decadence was a high art form. In addition, poetry, which holds a higher position in the hierarchy of genres than fiction, presents itself as a natural site for a literary trend that is regarded as high art. The decadent poetry of the period looks more like the strong definition of decadence that is based on a comparison with French decadence: it is less of a "pale shadow" in other words, than the fiction of the period. But while this view accords with an idealized view of decadence, one which the decadents themselves wanted to promote and one that has taken precedence in literary history, it does not accord with the fact that it was the decadence of fiction that garnered the most attention in the period. At a period in time when the expanding female and working-class readership was creating anxieties about access to literature, moral critics exerted far more vigilance in monitoring the potentially malignant influence of popular and highly accessible forms of literature than they did in the case of élite genres unlikely to attract a mass readership.

Where has this fiction that was regarded as decadent within its context gone in our critical histories of decadence? While there has been some work done on decadent fiction, once again, this work centres on a few texts, most notably Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, but also on the fiction of Walter Pater, and on some of the short stories of Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, and Hubert Crackanthorpe. Like the poetry, most of this work conforms to the high art characteristics associated with decadence and, if it does not, as in the case of Wilde's popular *Dorian Gray*, it at least has highly identifiable nods to decadent high art texts. This dissertation looks beyond these representative examples of decadent fiction and, in so doing, discovers a range of decadent fiction that is far more implicated in popular and commercial fiction than the decadent myth would have us believe could be true of decadence. Some of the works I will bring to light are works by well-known decadents whose less avant-garde fiction has been largely neglected in studies of decadence: Ernest Dowson and Arthur Moore's *Comedy of Masks*, for example, and John Davidson's *North Wall* fall into this category, works which engage in a mediation with the popular in a way that forces us to look again at the myth of decadence as a high art genre. Other works I bring to light are by writers excluded in histories of decadence, perhaps because they went against the grain of the myth of the tragic generation by living on well into the 1940s and thus had most of their careers in the twentieth century: Arthur Machen's *Great God Pan* and M. P Shiel's *Prince Zaleski* figure in this category. These works were published a few months before the Wilde scandal and each figured, in its own way, importantly in the controversy over literary decadence that the Wilde scandal triggered.

My suggestion that what was regarded as decadent in the period (but which has disappeared from most of our critical discussions of decadence today) be taken into account in a consideration of decadence addresses the next way in which I read against the grain of traditional ways of examining British decadence. In the dissertation I give voice to the oppositional and contestatory views of decadence as espoused by the opponents of decadence within the literary field, the critics, popular writers, and opponents of decadence among the literary élite. These oppositional views, I argue, are an important part of the meaning of decadence, if we allow that this meaning can be unstable and sometimes contradictory. Opponents of decadence, in charging the decadents with appealing to a popular readership in their work, a charge that goes against the grain of our received understandings of decadence, were not necessarily wrong, nor were they wholly right either. Their charge, however, points at the way in which meaning is part of a rich and complex web of "fictions" that circulate in any given time and that are conditioned by the material, social, cultural, and literary realities of the period in question.

In its focus on deconstructing certain central myths of decadence involving class identity, the relation of decadence to high art and the popular, and the romantic but largely false myth of the tragic generation, my dissertation gives less attention to issues of sexuality in relation to decadence. In part, this derives from my decentralization of Wilde in the thesis, a writer who has been so important in developing decadent criticism in this direction. Sexuality and, more properly, homosexuality in relation to decadence and aestheticism has been well represented in recent years by critics like Richard Dellamora, Dennis Denisoff, Kathy Psomiades, Alan Sinfield, and Ed Cohen and in collections such as Richard Dellamora's *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* and Constable's, Potolsky's and Denisoff's *Perennial Decay*. Similarly, I focus less on the kind of gender issues around notions of decadence and effeminacy that have concerned critics like Rita

Felski, Barbara Spackman, Regenia Gagnier, James Eli Adams, Richard Dellamora, and Linda Dowling simply because this issue is not central to the construction of decadent artistic identities in the case of the writers I am examining, nor is it a particularly striking feature of the fiction by these writers. Where I am interested in the question of gender and decadence is in terms of the gendered status of literary discourses and in the gendered hierarchical power structure of the literary field, issues that have been treated by Lyn Pykett and by Teresa Mangum. I am interested in the complex representation of decadence as both a masculine and high art discourse and a feminine popular discourse and the influence these constructions had on the relationship between decadents and women writers who, though they were often linked in the public imagination, felt a mutual antagonism towards each other.

My examination of the cultural uses to which decadence was put by way of competing fictions of decadence and my attempts to complicate and demystify some of the central myths of decadence are informed by the methodologies of cultural materialism and cultural sociology. My project develops from the work of critics like Gagnier, Freedman, and Guy and Small whose work has been so important in drawing attention to the importance of the material and social circumstances of Wilde's literary production of decadence. So too, Stetz's work on the Bodley Head and Laurel Brake's on the *Yellow Book* which, in exposing the degree to which Lane's ventures were implicated in the commercial marketplace, has enabled the kind of closer look that I take at the so-called avant-garde nature of the decadent project more broadly. This work on Wilde and on Lane has influenced the informing principles of my dissertation as I bring the kinds of questions these critics have raised to bear on a broader sampling of decadents within the period. And while my dissertation is not first and foremost a publishing history, work in this area has also been highly influential in my thinking about the way decadence was constructed, circulated and received in *fin de siècle* Britain. James G. Nelson's detailed and rich histories of the Bodley Head (1972), of Elkin Matthews (1989), and of Leonard Smithers (2000), the three most significant publishers of writers associated with decadence, and Peter D. McDonald's *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice 1880-1914* (1997) demonstrate how publishing history enriches and complicates our understanding of literary histories of writers, texts, and movements.

In discussing the development and circulation of fictions of decadence in fiction and in the press, the dissertation stresses the importance of the network of social and literary relations that involves, among others, writers, publishers, reviewers and readers and, as such, Pierre Bourdieu's model of the literary field looms large in the dissertation. Bourdieu's model offers a way of reading these relations and of connecting the literary to the social as I reconstruct the context in which "fictions of decadence" and decadent fiction were produced, circulated, and responded to and in which decadence was constructed in various ways by participants in the field as they battled for cultural authority. Important also, however, to my analysis of the decadents, particularly in the social context, is the work of social historian Harold Perkin on the professional class, the class out of which most of the decadents originated, and that of Raymond Williams on "structures of feeling," a methodology he developed as a means of analyzing cultural groups.The dissertation is divided into three parts--"Towards a Materialist History of Decadence," "Competing Fictions of Decadence," and "The Decadents after Decadence: Demystifying the Tragic Generation"--and subdivided into chapters within these parts. In part 1, I lay the groundwork for the construction of a materialist history of decadence through a close examination of the socio-cultural origins of the decadent type of artist and through a detailed consideration of the position of the decadent within the literary field and his relationships with others within the field. The first chapter draws on the work of social historian Harold Perkin to establish the professional middle-class background out of which the decadents emerged and, in so doing, it disrupts the popular association of the decadent with the upper class and demystifies his relationship to what might be considered a "lower-class" bohemia. In this chapter I read the emergence of aestheticism and decadence as a function of the rift between the professional and entrepreneurial middle class that Perkin describes. Borrowing Raymond Williams's notion of a "structure of feeling," I map out the construction of what I call the "decadent sensibility," a sensibility developed by the sons of professionals who would become decadents in response to the rift in the middle class. In constructing this sensibility, I argue, the decadents drew on certain values and ideals that they associated with the upper and working classes and used to identify a social space for the decadent to inhabit--Bohemia, a space well away from the professional and business middle class world they were attempting to break free from. In the second chapter of this section, I map out a description of the literary field and examine the centrality of aesthetics, ethics, and economics in the battle for cultural authority, particularly how these issues were used to construct competing images of the decadent by producers within the field. This chapter also begins the work that will be taken up in more detail Part 2, Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis--the deconstruction of the myth of decadence as élite art. In it, I outline the position of those who were cynical about the decadent's claims to high art status. Also, however, I point to a closer relationship between decadence and the popular by putting forth the beginnings of what I call the alternative literary origins of decadence. In this section, I investigate the decadent interest in writers like George Meredith and Robert Louis Stevenson as models of artistic identity, writers not normally though of as decadent influences. Finally, I discuss the important role that publishers played in determining the form decadence would take in the British context, a form that is largely a mediation between the popular and high art.

Part 2, "Competing Fictions of Decadence," traces the development of "fictions of decadence" and of the discourses and counter-discourses of decadence as they developed in fiction of various types and in the press from 1884 up to the moment of the Wilde trial. At the same time, Part 2 also continues the work of demystifying the relationship between the decadent and the popular. In the first chapter, I examine prototypes of the decadent writer figure in Vernon Lee's *Miss Brown* (1884), George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888) and Moore's *Mike Fletcher* (1889). I argue that the prototype of the decadent was born of the competing discourses around ethics, aesthetics, professionalism, readership, female authorship, and high and low culture that were issues in the ongoing struggle for cultural authority within the literary field. Specifically, I argue the decadent type emerged as a response to aestheticism and naturalism, the two controversial literary trends that preceded it as proponents of decadence sought to create a literature that combined elements of aestheticism and naturalism and as opponents of the emerging literary trend reacted against it in ways that developed discourses that had been directed against the two earlier literary forms.

Part 2, Chapter 2, takes up the popular counter-decadent constructions of decadence and the decadent in the press and in fiction from the point at which decadence began to circulate more widely among the broader public. I identify this point as the controversial reception of Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray* in 1890. I examine this reception as a construction of a male-dominated critical literary élite who are struggling to assert their cultural authority by equating decadence and Wilde with popular writing. I go on, in the next part of the chapter to compare and contrast the male critical construction of decadence with that of women writers of popular fiction, specifically Marie Corelli and Sarah Grand. I take up the counter-decadent representations before the decadent ones because, as I explain, the counter-discourses against aestheticism and naturalism that were quickly mobilized to create the counter-decadent discourse, in effect anticipating decadence before it had a chance to fully emerge. In addition, the conditions of production and reception were far more favourable to counter-decadent fiction than to the kind of advanced fiction decadents were interested in producing.

Chapter 3 of Part 2 examines representations of decadence within the élite periodicals and in the fiction produced by decadent writers. The chapter discusses the difficulties faced by writers who endorsed the more intellectual, philosophical, and high artistic decadence of their French and European counterparts but who had to contend with a more reticent English reading public and limited venues for the publication of this kind of work. I argue, then, that decadent writers attempted to introduce decadent themes, values, and ideals through the medium of popular genres. I frame my discussion of this mediation around the idea of "collaboration," describing the decadent intervention in popular genres as a collaboration between high and popular art as I examine Ernest Dowson's and Arthur Moore's *Comedy of Masks* (1893) and John Davidson's *The North Wall* (1886). With each of the works of decadent fiction, I assess the nature of these collaborations, the kind of feelings the necessity of such collaboration evoked in the writer, the kind of tensions this collaboration produced within the hybrid high/low work produced, and, where possible, the response evoked in the reception of these products of collaboration. I continue this line of argument in the Chapter 4 when I take up Arthur Machen's *Great God Pan* (1894) and M. P. Shiel's *Prince Zaleski* (1895). My discussion of these works requires some re-contextualization, however. By the time Machen and Shiel's works were published, the counter-decadent discourse was reaching its peak, a development that had implications for the reception of these works. Before discussing the works of Machen and Shiel, then, I describe the contours of this discourse as it developed in the months leading up to the trial and during the trial itself. I then go on to discuss the collaboration of high and low in the *Great God Pan* and *Prince Zaleski* and indicate how these works were received in the context of an increasingly hostile environment for literary decadence.

The demystification of the myth of the tragic generation forms the subject of Part 3. My intention is to go beyond the point where traditional literary histories end, to examine the involvement of decadents in literary fields other than that of the late 1880s to mid 1890s with which they are so strongly associated, and to see how the ideas that shaped their decadence in the 1890s continued to colour their subsequent work. In the first chapter, I set out the contexts of the post 1895 literary fields in which decadents found themselves. First, I describe the repercussions of the Wilde trial on the literary field and on the decadents within it, examining the ways in which they re-positioned themselves as a result of the backlash against literary decadence. Secondly, I provide an overview of the Edwardian and modernist literary fields in which the decadents figured as living participants or in which, if dead, they figured symbolically in the battles for cultural authority being fought out in the changing contexts of these twentieth-century literary fields. So too, I re-examine the relationship of decadence to modernism, arguing that while decadence has always been regarded as a significant literary influence on high modernist poetry, that the modernists' relationship to decadence in the period itself was conflicted and complex. In the second chapter of this section, I provide the "case studies" for my demystification of the myth of the tragic generation, re-figuring the stereotypes that, with their focus on decadence as a way of life, have so strongly overshadowed the productive engagements of decadents with the post 1895 literary fields.

This dissertation brings new light to bear on the subject of British decadence. On the one hand, I have recuperated a number of significant producers of decadence in order to broaden the range of writers considered in literary histories of decadence. Some of these, like George Moore, are well-known in other contexts but have not figured in histories of decadence. Others, like Arthur Machen and M. P. Shiel are more obscure, but equally central to a culturally and historically specific understanding of British decadence. In the case of these last two writers, I have undertaken major archival research consulting manuscripts, letters and publishers archives at the Harry Ransom Center (the John Lane Papers, the Shiel archives, and the Gawsworth archives [containing material relating to Shiel and Machen]), the Bodleian Library (the Walpole collection, Swann Sonnenschein and Grant Richards archives on microfilm), the British Library (the Royal Literary Fund archives on microfilm), the Public Records Office in London (Civil List Pension archives), and Reading University Library (Shiel archives and Elkin Mathews archives). None of this material has been previously brought to bear on studies of decadence. This research has been central in placing these writers at the centre of the decadent literary scene of the 1890s, in furthering my argument about the complex positioning of decadence in relation to both high and popular art forms, and in demystifying the myth of the tragic generation.

In addition, my recuperation and examination of some of the more obscure texts of British decadence has been enriched by extensive archival work at Colindale Library which houses the British Library's newspaper and periodical collection. These reviews have been vital in analyzing the construction of ideas about decadence and the reception of decadence within the period. The dissertation has also foregrounded how those other than the decadents played a central role in determining the form it would take in Britain--from publishers to popular writers to counter-decadent critics. Furthermore, I have created the beginnings of an alternative literary history of influences on decadence by discussing the importance of writers like George Meredith and Robert Louis Stevenson to the decadents, influences which must be read against the more traditionally acknowledged influences of high art writers like Baudelaire, Huysmans, Swinburne and Pater and force us to look at decadence in another way. The materialist approach I have taken, then, reveals the extent to which decadence must be understood, not simply on the terms put forth by its so-called proponents, but rather as a more broadly culturally constructed form which is conditioned by a vast array of social, literary and cultural forces.

Part 1

Towards a Materialist History of Decadence

Chapter 1

The Socio-Cultural Construction of the Decadent

Nothing, not even conventional virtue, is so provincial as conventional vice; and the desire to "bewilder the middle classes" is itself middle-class. (Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, 1899)

The image of the decadent aristocratic dandy--the "high society" decadent of Oscar Wilde's society plays and of his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a familiar one. So too is the almost diametrically opposed image of the Bohemian decadent, starving in a garret in Paris, living the low-life among social outcasts and wretches, addicted to drugs or drink. Both have become well-known stereotypes of the decadent. Less familiar, perhaps, is the image invoked by Symons--the middle-class or bourgeois decadent; I say less familiar because the basis of decadence--its central feature, more important even than stylistics according to Regenia Gagnier--is precisely its rejection of middle-class life (65). And yet, Symons's depiction of the decadent as middle-class is closest to the true class origins of the decadent. In reality, most of the writers associated with British decadence did indeed come from middle-class families and it was here that decadence as a rejection of middle-class life originated. The aristocratic and bohemian decadent are "fictions" that were constructed by the decadents in order to mystify these class origins. Ironically, this project, as Symons notes, only exposed them for the middle-class (and often "provincial") subjects that they were. He ought to have known. He was a middle-class decadent himself..

In this chapter, I trace the origins of these "decadent fictions of class," fictions that not only serve in the construction of the social identity of the decadents, but were also inflected strongly in the decadent fiction of the period--the subject of Part 2 of the dissertation. In this chapter I argue that the "fictions" of the decadent as aristocrat and the decadent as bohemian, fictions that would attain something of a mythic status, emerged as a product of the tensions between the professional and business (what the decadents disparagingly called the bourgeois or the philistine) fractions of the middle class from the mid-nineteenth century on, as the middle class as a whole gained hegemonic power and as the professional class fraction expanded rapidly. Whereas the professional middle class, the intellectuals among them in particular, were trying to create the conditions of an ideal culture, the business middle class developed an increasingly commercial culture. These differing aims resulted in a rift between the cultural and economic leaders of the British Empire. This rift--a rift endlessly reproduced in the artistic productions of decadents--created the cultural conditions for the emergence of decadence and of a decadent sensibility that privileged aristocratic and, to a slightly lesser extent, working-class cultural values over those of the decadents' own class.

In the first section of this chapter--"Breeding Decadence: Professionals vs. Capitalists in the Mid-Victorian Period"--I trace the development of professionalism and the rift between the professional and capitalist business middle class, focusing on the role of the intellectual as professional and considering the importance of culture and the arts in the dissemination of the professional ideology. In the second section--"Anywhere but Here: The Decadents and the Construction of an Alternative Social Identity"--I examine the decadent response to the rift in the middle class, a response which involved a rejection not only of the business middle-class ideology but also of the professional roles that they had been raised to take up.

Employing a methodology akin to that developed by Raymond Williams in "Literature and Sociology" and applied by him in his examination of the "Bloomsbury Fraction," I sketch out a decadent "structure of feeling"--a sense of common characteristics, of a common "consciousness of the social group--in real terms, the social class--which finally created them" ("Literature and Sociology" 24). I call this "structure of feeling" the "decadent sensibility." Elements of this sensibility derived from the cultural ideals and values of the aristocracy on the one hand and the working class on the other. Other key terms central to the decadent sensibility are "dilettantism" and "bohemianism" both of which may be seen to derive from the decadent investment in aristocratic and working-class culture. In examining the elements that made up the decadent sensibility, I will consider both how the decadents saw themselves and wished to be understood and how this sensibility may be understood in relation to the larger social and cultural context in which this sensibility emerged. I will also discuss the tensions that emerge as the decadent sensibility is understood in the broader context, an understanding that was frequently opposed to the representation the decadents themselves sought to promote and which ultimately exposed, as Symons suggests, the middle-classness of the ostensibly anti middle-class project of the decadents. As I will go on to argue in the second chapter the tensions between the manifest and the implicit meanings of the decadent at the social level go on to reproduce themselves within the literary field affecting the decadents' relations with other artists and creating ambivalences within their artistic productions.

I

Breeding Decadence: Professionals vs. Capitalists in the Mid-Victorian Period

The Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867 paved the way for the ascendancy of the Victorian middle class over the aristocracy in terms of social and economic power. But the middle class was, as Harold Perkin describes, a "riven" class, and the Victorian era must be seen not only as the record of a conflict between the working, middle, and upper classes, but also of the struggle within one class to determine what values and ideals would shape Victorian society (78). This conflict was not, as might be expected, between the upper and lower middle class, but rather between the business and professional fractions of the middle class or between a capitalist or entrepreneurial and non-capitalist ideology. In *The Rise of Professional Society*, Perkin calls the professional class a fourth class or "the forgotten middle class" and he argues that this class had a profound impact on the development of Victorian class society (xii). The Industrial Revolution increased the power of professionals just as it did that of the other portions of the middle class. Though initially comprised of those in the clergy, law, medicine, and intellectual professions (men of letters, men of science, university teachers, artists), new "professions" proliferated throughout the nineteenth century to include engineers, architects, pharmacists, accountants, surgeons, librarians, bankers, etc. In addition, the period from 1880 to 1914 saw an addition of thirty-nine new professional associations to the existing twenty-seven associations (Perkin 85). The emerging professionals challenged the capitalist ideology not by competing with the business middle class on its own terms but rather by attempting to impose their own ideology on Victorian society. As Perkin writes, the professional class

> transform[ed] society . . . not by replacing the plutocracy of landlords and capitalists as the ruling class, but in a much more radical and subtle way. Professionalism differed from land and capital as an organizing principle

> of social structure in not being confined to the few, those who owned the limited material resources of society and could charge the rest in rent, profits, or a lien on their labour, for the use of them. Based on human capital and specialized expertise, it could become as extensive as there were human beings capable of skilled and specialized service. (xii)

The professional class opposed the industrial and capitalist values of the business class and professionals regarded themselves as above the economic struggles that characterized Victorian society. They strove to act as critics of and mentors to society, seeking to mould it according to their anti-industrial social ideal which was based on the idea of public service that professionals "assumed" was a "national and cultural [and] not a class ideal" (Perkin 120). "Their method," argues Perkin, "was to start from the existing ideals of those classes, the concept of the English gentleman and the gospel of work, and to transform them into variants of their own professional ideal" in the production of a new concept of the gentleman (120). This transformation of the idea of the gentleman was initiated largely through the reformation of public schools and universities in the early Victorian period (Perkin 120). While this professional ideal had at least a temporary influence on the succeeding generation of Victorian "gentlemen," increasingly "professional and entrepreneurial ideals began to diverge" and the gentleman, as defined by the professional class, began to look less and less like the middle-class entrepreneur (Perkin 121). The new professional gentleman, on the contrary, was diametrically opposed to the middle class entrepreneur. Now he was "defined by his 'fine and governing qualities' [Matthew Arnold's phrase] his cultured education, intellectual interests and qualities of character, which rose above mere money making, while the work permissible to him was narrowed down to professional or public service to society, the state, or the empire, to the exclusion of 'money-grabbing' industry and trade" (Perkin 121).

Perhaps nowhere was this rift more apparent than in the relationship between professional intellectuals and the business class. In the mid-Victorian period, professional intellectuals like Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin had hopes that professional social ideals might be transmitted through the arts. In *Culture and Anarchy* (1873), Arnold valorized "Culture," what he described as--"getting to know . . . the best which has been thought and said in the world, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits" (5). This "Culture," Arnold believed, might be the saviour of the middle class and indeed of all classes in British society--the "barbarian" upper class, the "philistine" middle classes, and the working-class "populace." For Arnold, as a professional, the role of cultural leaders was "not to make what each raw person may like the rule by which he fashions himself; but to draw ever nearer to a sense of what is indeed beautiful, graceful, and becoming, and to get the raw person to like that" (*Culture and Anarchy* 34-35). But despite reform attempts in a number of professional roles--inspector of schools, man of letters, professor of English poetry, cultural critic--Arnold was at heart sceptical about the ability of the business middle class to achieve the social ideals he professed.

More optimistic, at least initially, and more far-reaching than Arnold in his democratic ideals was Ruskin who sought to demonstrate the ethical and moral values of art and the relation of a nation's art to its social and moral aspects. But, like Arnold, he too came to be disillusioned. Late in his career, as he surveyed the results of his efforts to transform Victorian social values, he regarded with despair what he saw as the complete misappropriation of his ideals by the Victorian middle class. From his point of view, they had ignored the social message of his works and had taken up his ideas in a superficial manner. In the case of his *Stones of Venice* (1851-53), for example, the public had ignored the main focus which Ruskin insisted was concerned with the "relation of the art of Venice to her moral temper . . . and that of the life of the workman to his work" (*Stones of Venice*, qtd. in Dowling, *Vulgarization* 40-1). Instead, as Linda Dowling argues, "the minutiae of Venetian Gothic ornament had become a new gospel, pored over, misunderstood, misapplied, and, worst of all, given material embodiment in the greasy, striated monstrosities of [what Ruskin called] the 'streaky bacon style'" (Dowling, *Vulgarization* 41). Dismayed by these material mis-embodiments of his aesthetic and social message, Ruskin referred to them as "these accursed Frankenstein monsters of, *in*directly, my own making" (qtd. in Dowling, *Vulgarization* 41). As Jonathan Freedman argues, Ruskin was unable to control the way his work was taken up by various audiences who turned "Ruskin into 'Ruskin,' . . . a cultural institution, an anthologized 'master,' whose critical authority could be invoked when necessary but conveniently ignored, or distorted, or elided, when not" (62).

As the case of Ruskin makes clear, the increasing divergence between the professional and business middle class was not so much caused by the inability of the middle class to absorb professional values as it was by their transformation and adaptation of these ideals to their own capitalist value system. Increasingly throughout the period the values of the professional class had a significant influence on Victorian society but, to the dismay of men like Arnold and Ruskin, this influence seemed to reveal itself solely in superficial material forms--in fashions and fads in the realms of architecture, furnishing, home decoration, and dress--with no corresponding spiritual, social, or intellectual enlightenment. Such superficial manifestations of the intellectual projects of men like Arnold and Ruskin were perhaps inevitable in the hands of a dominant entrepreneurial middle class that equated progress with material wealth and that relied on consumption and display as a means of demonstrating its social importance.[1] From the point of view of professional intellectuals, the middle class had debased and commodified art, the very thing that was meant to be the cultural, social, and moral saviour of the Victorian middle class and of Victorian society.

At least part of the reason for the failure of Arnold's and Ruskin's attempts to enlighten the Victorian public can be attributed to another "Frankenstein monster" of the mid-Victorian professional intellectuals--aestheticism--an artistic, literary, and cultural movement that began in the 1850s, reached its peak in the 1870s and 80s, and shaded over into the decadence of the 1890s. Broadly speaking, aestheticism valorized the beautiful in art over moral, social, religious, and political considerations and asserted the independence of art from the gross materialism and capitalism of Victorian England.[2]

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[1] See Dianne MacLeod's *Art and the Victorian Middle Class* for a discussion of the relationship between aestheticism, wealth, luxury goods, and the commodity aesthetic (277-78). For more on the connection between aestheticism and consumer or mass culture see also Regenia Gagnier's *Idylls of the Marketplace*, Chapter 4 of Patrick Brantlinger's *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* and his "Mass Media and Culture in fin de siècle Europe," and Rita Felski's *The Gender of Modernity* 91-114.

[2] The exact dates of the aesthetic movement are difficult to determine. For those critics who include the Pre-Raphaelites in the movement, aestheticism begins in 1850 with the publication of *The Germ*. For those like Ian Small who see Pre-Raphaelitism as a separate phenomenon, aestheticism originates in the late 1860s in the poetry and criticism of Swinburne. As to its status as a broad cultural movement rather than a strictly literary

On the one hand, aestheticism, as a stringent critique of capitalist culture, was a professional discourse par excellence. In fact, Jonathan Freedman gives a special role to aestheticism in the development of professional culture. Aestheticism, he claims, was "not just . . . a means towards establishing 'the culture of professionalism'; aestheticism helped to create the profession of culture making itself. It helped create a new caste of professionals who designated themselves as experts in cultural knowledge, and who defined their own role as that of instructing others in the lineaments of that knowledge" (55). The new rash of "professionals" that aestheticism created included art experts, makers and vendors of fine books, furniture, wallpaper, and domestic goods, interior decorators, and a new brand of professionalized artist. On the other hand, however, as the nature of some of these new vocations suggest, aestheticism, despite its status as a professional discourse, was highly implicated in the very materialist culture it claimed to oppose. Consequently, aestheticism, even though it developed out of the project of men like Ruskin and Arnold, became yet another "Frankenstein monster." Ironically, and unfortunately, many of aestheticism's central tenets fit all too well into the ideology of consumer culture as these tenets were exploited by the commercial press, the advertising industry, and by the manufacturers and vendors of "aesthetic" commodities (Freedman 13). What men like Arnold and Ruskin did not anticipate as they formulated their social critiques and attempted to cultivate the classes and masses was "the spectacular ability of

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or artistic movement most critics agree. For a discussion of the various non-literary and non-artistic manifestations of aestheticism see Ian Fletcher's "Some Aspects of Aestheticism" in which he discusses the numerous "House Beautiful" manuals inspired by aestheticism beginning with Charles Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste* (1868). Eastlake's manual was followed by a number of aesthetic manuals for the home including *Suggestions for House Decoration* (1877) by the Misses Garrett, *Art in the House* (1879) by Jakob von Falke, *Beautiful Houses* (1881) by Mrs. M. E. Haweis, and *Rainbow-Music or the Philosophy of Harmony in Colour Grouping* (1886) by Lady Archibald Campbell. Fletcher also details the "missionary" aestheticism of the Kyrle Society, an aestheticism that in fact did seek to bring the aesthetic and the moral into relation. "Missionary aesthetes" combined socialist ideals with aesthetic principles as members sought to beautify the surroundings of the poor. Finally, Fletcher discusses the dress reform movement as an aspect of aestheticism. The supporters of the movement had various and not always shared views about the need for dress reform. Again there was a split--between those aesthetes for whom dress reform was simply an aesthetic issue and those who endorsed beautiful clothing that was also be healthy and useful.

an advanced consumer society to transform criticisms of that society into objects of consumption" (Freedman 60).

Aestheticism was highly appealing to the prosperous but culturally naive dominant middle class because, unlike the vague Arnoldian definition of "Culture," it provided tangible symbols of cultural competency. As Dianne Sachko Macleod notes, "Aestheticism's well-crafted and expensive-looking objects served as easily identifiable markers for the socially mobile" (277). In excusing what might have seemed an extravagant and vulgar display of wealth, the middle class drew upon the ideals of the professional intellectuals to defend themselves: "The ownership of luxury goods . . . was," Macleod writes, "not a self-indulgence as long as one's intellectual development was maintained" and "[middle-class] patrons of the aesthetic movement were encouraged to display their wealth in personalized shrines to beauty as tangible evidence of transcendent elevation of thought" (278). The aestheticization of everyday life in home decoration, dress, and the consumption and display of art, then, served a number of functions for the middle class and the display of wealth, if not the least important function, was certainly the most mystified. Most importantly, aestheticism served the middle class as evidence of their cultural sophistication; aestheticism as a form of what Bourdieu has called the "sacralization of art," functioned then, for the middle class to consolidate their economic dominance and to confirm the legitimacy of their social position (*Field* 235-36).

The zeal with which aesthetic ideals were taken up and transformed by middle-class consumer culture represented a serious affront to professional intellectuals like Arnold and Ruskin. In the face of the degradation and vulgarization of their ideals, professional intellectuals became increasingly sceptical about the possibility of fulfilling their commitments to the middle class, commitments which had been defined by Henry B. Thompson in his 1857 book *The Choice of Profession*, a guide to professional careers: "The importance of the professions and the professional classes can hardly be overrated, they form the head of the great English middle class, maintain its tone of independence, keep up to the mark its standard of morality, and direct its intelligence" (qtd. in Perkin 84).

By the 1880s, however, the rift between the professional and business and industrial middle class had taken hold and many professionals, intellectuals and artists in particular, felt less and less responsible to a class that had betrayed their ideals. The less socially-engaged brand of aesthetes--direct precursors of the 1890s decadents--had begun, in the 1880s, the process of distancing themselves from the bourgeois middle class who had so distorted their ideals. Artists like Oscar Wilde and James McNeill Whistler, for example, adopted aristocratic stances and represented themselves as beings marked by a refinement and taste that could never be attained by the middle class.[3] Furthermore, they used the discourse of aestheticism "to construct [themselves] as alienated, isolated, [and] oppressed" and refused "to confirm the grand narratives of [middle class] Victorian society" (Freedman 54; Macleod 272). In other words, while they maintained their professional role as instructors in "the lineaments of cultural knowledge" (Freedman 55), their antagonistic stance indicated their scepticism regarding the ability of the middle class to take up this knowledge in any meaningful way.

II

Anywhere but Here: The Decadents and the Construction of an Alternative Social Identity

It was out of this context that the decadents emerged. Born in the years between the mid- 1850s and the early 1870s, raised in a time when the rift between the business and professional class was becoming increasingly pronounced, and coming of age during the height of the commercialized appropriation of aestheticism by a bourgeois middle class, the writers who would come to be associated with decadence would develop their own response to the internal divisions within the middle class. Before going on to discuss this response, I want to draw attention to the striking similarities of the social and cultural backgrounds of many of the writers who would become decadents. These social and cultural conditions formed the breeding ground for what would come to constitute what I am calling a decadent sensibility.

Though some decadent writers like Max Beerbohm, Richard Le Gallienne, and Ernest Dowson came from the business or merchant middle-class fraction, their fathers were not of the capitalist and industrialist type that so offended the professional middle class. In the case of Le Gallienne, his was a family that had, to a great extent, internalized professional ideals in a way desired by the professional middle class. Le Gallienne's father, who was a brewery manager in Liverpool, was a devout man who sent his son to Liverpool College, a school which, according to Le Gallienne's biographer, provided "a passable, but not too expensive, imitation of a public school education" (Whittington-Egan 18). This education provided a solid ground for the professional ambitions that Le Gallienne senior had for his son, ambitions that led him to obtain an apprenticeship for Richard with a firm of accountants. The cases of Beerbohm and Dowson were somewhat different than that of Le Gallienne though their backgrounds, too, were acceptable within a professional ideological framework. Their families, though involved in trade and industry, were highly gentrified and their fathers well-educated, qualities which ensured them acceptability among professional people.

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[3] Though I use Wilde as an exponent of aestheticism in this section, I regard him as an example of an artist who explored various phases of aestheticism and who also went on to develop a decadent sensibility.

Overwhelmingly, however, the writers associated with decadence came directly from the ranks of the professional middle class, like Oscar Wilde whose father was a renowned surgeon. By far the most prominent profession associated with the fathers of decadents was that of clergyman. Arthur Machen, John Davidson, Arthur Symons and Robert Hichens were all sons of clergymen and all attended public schools where they received an education fit for those destined to enter the ranks of professional society. Many of the decadents (including those with non-professional backgrounds) did, in fact, pursue other kinds of "professional" callings (such as law, medicine, teaching, accounting and architecture) before turning to arts and letters including Machen, M. P. Shiel, Davidson, Le Gallienne, Dowson and Aubrey Beardsley.[4]

If many of the decadents were educated in the kind of public schools that produced professional men, many also did not continue their education beyond this level. Neither Shiel, nor Machen, nor Le Gallienne, nor Symons attended university, while Davidson and Dowson did not complete their university studies. In fact, this lack of university education was not unusual among professionals (except for the clergy) who, for the most part, entered the professions through apprenticeship. In addition to their similar educational experiences, the decadents, despite the disparity in their vertical positioning within the middle class, were in similar economic positions in terms of money they stood to gain through family inheritance. Machen and Hichens, for example, were both endowed with or in expectation of receiving £400-£500 per year while Dowson, at the time of his death, was in expectation of receiving £600 to £700 from the settlement of his parents' estate.[5]

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[4] In *Professions of Taste*, Jonathan Freedman makes a similar argument regarding the class background of the aesthetes (48). In emphasizing the middle-class origins of the aesthetes, however, Freedman does not mark a distinction between the professional and business middle class though he does go on to describe aestheticism itself as a professional discourse par excellence (55).

As aspiring professionals and sons of professionals, the decadents grew up with a sense of social superiority. The fact that many of the decadents also came from families in which the arts and cultural and intellectual interests were encouraged heightened this sense of superiority and aligned them with the professional intellectuals who were, of all the professions, the most disgusted with the social dominance of the capitalist ideals of the business middle class over the cultural ideals of the professionals. So too, the predominance of cultural "otherness" among decadents like Machen (Welsh), Davidson (Scottish), Shiel (Irish / West Indian), Beerbohm (German), and Wilde (Irish) influenced their sense of difference, of distinction within Victorian society.[6]

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[5] £400-£500 represented a solid middle-class income for a family so it was certainly a substantial amount for a single man or a couple. Hichens never saw the £500 per year that his father had promised would be his due. The Hichens's lived a fairly extravagant life and, as Hichens noted, his father "was too kind to those who came to him for money" (*Yesterday* 235). Machen, on the other hand, did receive his money. If he had invested it, he would have had a small yearly income for about thirty years and, after that, a very small income (£60). Machen chose instead to live off of it while he could. Thus, for a period of eleven years Machen received amounts of about £400 to £500, an amount he described as enough for two people to live "very sufficiently" on (Machen, *Things Near and Far* 89-90; 94). George Moore, though of the aristocratic landlord class in Ireland, also had an income of about £500 a year in the 1880s (other income from the estate went to his mother and towards upkeep of the estate), though there was a period during which rents were not being paid and Moore was forced to live off his writing.

[6] Though Shiel grew up not in England but in Montserrat, I include him among those decadents influenced by the rift between the professional and business middle class because of the parallels between his upbringing in Montserrat and those of his peers in England. Shiel was from prominent island families on both his paternal and maternal sides. His father, Matthew Dowdy Shiell (M. P. Shiel later dropped the second "l"), a ship-owner, lay-preacher, store-keeper, and trader, was of the business middle class but, both in class and racial terms, had a sense of social superiority within Montserrat society.

Coming of age in the 1880s and witness to what was perceived by many of the intellectual class to be a misappropriation of professional ideals by the business middle class, the decadents furthered the project of aesthetes like Wilde and Whistler who had begun to distance themselves from the middle class before the period of decadence. Decadents exhibited even more animosity towards the middle class than earlier aesthetes had and decadent art reflects this disdain in a more powerful way than aestheticism. Amoral conceptions of art gave way to immoral ones and the cult of beauty was replaced by the cult of the beauty of ugliness and sin. Decadents interested themselves in the artificial, the unnatural, the morbid, the perverse, the neurotic, and in states of ennui. Rather than merely distinguishing themselves from the bourgeois middle class, decadents insisted on doing so in a more deliberately offensive and provocative manner--this was the "bewildering the middle classes" to which Symons referred.

Whereas the aesthetes were professionals in the sense that, as Freedman argues, they "designated themselves as experts in cultural knowledge, and . . . defined their own role as that of instructing others in the lineaments of that knowledge," the decadents (and some of the later aesthetes), though equally endowed with cultural knowledge, were reluctant to perform their role as instructors (55). Instead of using a professional discourse to *instruct* others, the decadents used it to *alienate* others. Though an aesthete like Walter Pater had imagined himself addressing a community of like-minded readers, those he characterized in his essay "Style" as the "select few, those 'men of finer thread' who have formed and maintain the literary ideal"--and though he worried about possible misinterpretations of his work, he did not aggressively and deliberately set out to exclude others (*Appreciations* 14-15). The decadents did. They imagined themselves speaking to a community of like-minded readers and addressed them as such while at the same time directly confronting their unsympathetic bourgeois reader--the "*hypocrite lecteur*"--with

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That Shiell had his son crowned King of Redonda (an island off Montserrat) gives an idea of the degree of this sense of social superiority. Shiell passed this sense of superiority onto his son, the only son in a family of ten children who was also treated by his mostly black playmates as a god (Billings 84). Shiell had professional ambitions for his son and sent him to one of the best schools in the islands. These ambitions included apprenticing his son to a local chemist, having him enter the Wesleyean ministry, or having him pursue a post in the Colonial Office.

accusations of ignorance and of "baseness" and "unworthiness" (Moore, *Confessions* 179). The decadents as possessors of "cultural knowledge" did not want to translate this knowledge into the social and economic rewards that were the right of the professional because it would bring them into a relation of dependency on the bourgeois middle class they despised. They refused to serve. This refusal to serve constituted a significant element of the decadent sensibility.

Though in large part this abandonment of the professional service function was a gesture of defiance aimed at the business middle class, it also alienated the decadents from their own professional class roots. This division was, I would argue, a deliberately created one. To many of the decadents, professionalism had become subsumed in the bourgeois capitalist ideology.[7] The decadents rejected the label of professional, instead cultivating a studied dilettantism or amateurism. These concepts were an important element of the emerging decadent sensibility in terms of signalling a resistance to both professional and capitalist ideologies. The concepts of the dilettante (defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a lover of the fine arts; one who *toys with* a subject or studies it *without seriousness*" [emphasis added]) and the amateur (defined in *Oxford English Dictionary* as "one who is fond of thing; one who practices a thing [esp. an art or game] only as a pastime") functioned for the decadents in constructing a concept of knowledge-for-knowledge's sake that was akin to art-for-art's sake in its implication of a non-productive economy that was at once anti-capitalist and anti-professional. Dilettantes and amateurs could be very knowledgeable but they did not put this knowledge to *productive* use: they "toyed with" the arts or pursued them as a "pastime" and knowledge was certainly not cultivated in exchange for money. In his autobiography, Machen describes his writing in dilettantish terms: "I *cultivated* literature," he writes adding that "making books" is "his chosen *sport*," a sport "entirely divorced from all commercial considerations" (*Things Near and Far* 96; emphasis added).

Dilettantism was also a form of rebellion against traditional education, the kind of education that, from the decadent point of view, produced middle-class subjects. "Education is fatal to anyone with a spark of artistic feeling. . . . Education destroys individuality" writes Moore in *Confessions of a Young Man*, a novel which provides a model for the self-education of the artist (111, 112). The decadents sought to educate themselves in a manner that would emphasize their individuality, their distinction, their difference from the middle class. For Moore, life provided this education and he called himself a "student . . . of ball rooms, bar rooms, streets, and alcoves" (*Confessions* 84). For others like Machen and Shiel, this alternative education took the form of studies in esoteric subjects and arcana. This dilettantish and decadent idea of education would come to be criticized in the 1890s, in a form of reverse snobbism, as "cheap self-culture" by the opponents of decadence (Dowling, "Decadent" 443-44). For decadents, however, dilettantism and amateurism represented an attempt to construct themselves outside the cycle of production.

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[7] The decadents were not the only ones who viewed professionalism in this way. Stephen Arata argues that Robert Louis Stevenson "saw professionalism as inseparable from the middle classes" and equated it with prostitution (44, 49).

Dilettantism was a key term, along with decadence, in Paul Bourget's *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine*, a book that had a profound influence on the decadents and that Havelock Ellis wrote on in one of the earliest discussions of French decadence in the English press. As Ellis, echoing Bourget, notes, dilettantism had come, in the nineteenth century, to be "identified in our minds with those defects of frivolity and superficiality into which the dilettante spirit most easily falls" (53). In the British Victorian context, dilettantism was particularly suspect in a culture that increasingly valued industry and utility. But both Bourget and the English decadents tried to recuperate a positive connotation for dilettantism. Bourget described dilettantism as "a disposition of the mind, at once very intelligent and very emotional, which inclines us in turn towards the various forms of life, and leads us to lend ourselves to all these forms without giving ourselves to any" (qtd. in Ellis 55). For the decadents, this notion of experience without commitment ("lend[ing] ourselves to all these forms without giving ourselves to any") was central and explains their often superficial appropriation of class values other than their own.

For the decadents, in particular, dilettantism was associated with an aristocratic tradition and, in cultivating dilettantism, the decadents demonstrated their allegiance to an older aristocratic social model. The decadent, in his cultivation of knowledge in the manner of a dilettante was the aristocratic "snob" with the "faith of the old world . . . in his breast" who, in Moore's terms, represented "the ark that floats triumphant over the democratic wave" (*Confessions* 140). This dilettantism was, then, for the decadent, an important link with the aristocratic culture that they would come to uphold.

Insofar, then, as they were unwilling to serve the capitalist middle class as professionals, the decadents increasingly aligned themselves with other class identities through which they concealed their middle-class origins. Chief among these appropriated class identities was that of the aristocrat. This appropriation had been made earlier by aesthetes like Wilde in the 1880s. In many respects, this act of appropriation was an attempt to hold on to a culture in decline--an aristocratic "residual culture," to use Williams's term, that had been in decline since the 1880s and that was being replaced by an "emergent" middle-class capitalist culture ("Residual and Emergent Cultures" 40, 41). One of the main causes of its decline, a cause that certainly would have rallied the anti-bourgeois aesthetes and decadents in its defence, was an *embourgeoisement* that took two forms. On the one hand, aristocrats were increasingly becoming involved in the world of business, a venture in which, as François Bédarida argues, they ran "the risk of contaminating [their] patrician spirit by contact with the bourgeois mentality" (128). On the other hand, the newly wealthy middle class were increasingly able to "penetrate . . . the magic circle of the aristocracy" through ennoblement and marriage (Bédarida 128). Bédarida suggests that "some people were repelled by the sight of the aristocratic spirit dabbling in commercialism" and cites, as an example, William Gladstone who "deplored the growing number of 'hybrids', half business men, half country gentleman" (128). Though ideologically the aesthetes and decadents were worlds away from Gladstone, it is easy to understand, given their view of the capitalist and industrialist middle class, how their adoption of an old-style aristocratic ethos served as a rebellion against the hegemony of the new ruling class. In addition to the cultivation of dilettantism which the decadents associated with aristocratic culture, the decadents also adopted the hauteur, leisurely attitude and extravagant dress associated with the privileged aristocrat. In addition, they cultivated the negative traits associated with the aristocracy: the indolence, dissipation, and waste that countered bourgeois industry, thrift, utilitarianism and respectability.

At the other end of the social scale, the working classes provided an alternative social identity which the decadents could draw on to demonstrate their resistance to middle-class hegemony. The period in which the decadents came of age and began to formulate their anti-bourgeois ethos also marked a period of increased working-class radicalism and revolt against the existing social conditions. Both the decadents and the working classes were fighting the same enemy to a large extent, though the stakes for the working class were clearly much higher. The cultural and aesthetic basis of the decadent rebellion paled in comparison with the more real social injustices that the working class was protesting against. Nonetheless, the common enemy was, from the decadent point of view, reason enough to find themselves in sympathy with the working class. This association was, however, rather more vexed than the decadent appropriation of old aristocratic ideals. The sympathy of the decadents with the working class certainly did not extend to the working-class struggle against social injustice. The image of the mass and of the mob was as repellent to the decadents as it was to the larger element of the middle class for whom the mass, as historian E. Spencer Wellhofer notes, "presented three clear and eminent dangers: anarchy, mediocrity, and tyranny" (9). Mediocrity was perhaps the most dangerous of the three from the point of view of the decadents who viewed democracy and universal education as instrumental in the mediocratization of British culture.

Rather, in keeping with their interest in culture in art, the decadents idealized a largely imagined working-class culture, focusing on elements that they believed represented a protest against bourgeois culture. Paramount among those elements of working-class culture that the decadents celebrated was the music hall, an institution glorified in the work of George Moore, Arthur Symons, John Davidson, Max Beerbohm, Theodore Wratislaw, Selwyn Image, and many others associated with decadence. In its propagation of hedonism, ribaldry, and sensuality, values that decadents associated with the working-class and that were antithetical to those of the dominant middle class, the music hall reflected the anti-bourgeois sentiments of the decadents. It is not unsurprising that the anti-bourgeois values the music hall promoted were also those that the decadents valued in their aristocratic role models at the other end of the social scale. Characteristic of the decadent view of the music hall as a protest against middle-class art and culture is

Moore's declaration in *Confessions of a Young Man*: "The music-hall is a protest against Sardou and the immense drawing-room sets, rich hangings, velvet sofas, etc. . . . The music-hall is a protest against the villa, the circulating library, the club, and for all this the "'all" is inexpressibly dear to me" (147).[8]

In mystifying their professional middle-class backgrounds through an appropriation of aristocratic and working-class values, then, the decadents strove to construct a social identity for themselves, an identity that crystallized in the figure of the decadent bohemian and in a largely imaginary social space--Bohemia. It has been argued, by Joanna Richardson among others, that Bohemia never existed in England, that "there was no sense of a Bohemian movement . . . [and] no bohemian colony" (qtd. in Brantlinger, "Bohemia" 28).[9] Certainly this belief was echoed by decadents like Arthur Symons who lamented the fact that there was no equivalent to the Parisian bohemian life in England when he said of the Rhymers' Club, "[it] was a desperate and ineffectual attempt to get into key with the Latin Quarter" ("Ernest Dowson" 263). In its presumption of an archetypal Bohemia, these arguments resemble those that claim there is no British decadence. If the model is not replicated exactly, so the argument goes, it does not exist. But there was a British Bohemia both in real geographical and ideological terms though it may have differed from what is regarded as the original French model. Certainly there were many spaces within *fin de siècle* London that qualified as Bohemian. In *Bohemia in London* (1907), Arthur Ransome identifies Soho restaurants and coffee-houses, Bloomsbury, Chelsea, the Café Royal, and Fleet Street pubs as Bohemian locations. There were also, of course, the West End music halls. More importantly, however, there is a strong sense of an ideological Bohemia--Bohemia as a state of mind--

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[8] There is an irony in the decadent interest in the music hall as an anti-bourgeois space given the fact that in the 1890s, as Martha Vicinus notes, the music halls became increasingly popular among the middle classes (249). Nonetheless, there were distinctions between kinds of music halls. The music halls of the West End, frequented by aristocrats and artists, were different from either those frequented by the middle class or those frequented by the working class (Kift 62).

[9] Richardson's book is *The Bohemians: la Vie de Bohème in Paris, 1830-1914*. Others who argue that there was no London Bohemia in the *fin de siècle* period include Hugh David who, in *The Fitzrovians: A Portrait of Bohemian Society 1900-1955*, claims that a real Bohemianism only came to London in the twentieth century, reaching its heyday in the 1940s.

among the decadents of the 1890s if we take into account the way class is represented in Bohemia. In *The Rules of Art*, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, describing the class ambiguity of Bohemia argues, "near to the 'people,' with whom it often shares its misery, it is separated from them by the art of living that defines it socially and which, even if ostentatiously opposed to the conventions and proprieties of the bourgeoisie, is situated nearer to the aristocracy or the grande bourgeoisie than to the orderly petite-bourgeoisie" (56). David Weir makes a similar argument with respect to the class position of the decadent bohemian: "The bohemian is always at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale, either in reality or imagination. . . . Sometimes the decadent may pursue a bohemian life-style, but he always imagines himself a cultural aristocrat, while being, at base, thoroughly bourgeois" (xv).

Bohemia, then, embodies all the class ambiguities that I have been attributing to decadents as they constructed themselves in opposition to the ruling middle class. Despite all appearances to the contrary, Bohemia is undeniably a bourgeois space where the members of the professional and middle class go to deny their bourgeoisness, to indulge in both the high life and the low life while avoiding the stifling conservative middle (-class) way. It is a bourgeois space that imagines itself and is always represented as a classless space of equality where, for example, the aristocracy rub shoulders with the working class, where artists live like kings on the days they have money and like paupers on the days they do not, and where the middle class supposedly never enters. Moore's description of English Bohemia in *Confessions of a Young Man* is a striking expression of these elements of this aspect of Bohemianism:

> I found in Curzon Street another "Nouvelles Athènes," a Bohemianism of titles that went back to the Conquest, a Bohemianism of the ten sovereigns always jingling in the trousers pocket, of scrupulous cleanliness, of hansom cabs, of ladies' pet names; of triumphant champagne, of debts, gaslights, supper-parties, morning light, coaching: a fabulous Bohemianism; a Bohemianism of eternal hardupishness and eternal squandering of money,--money that rose at no discoverable well-head and flowed into a sea of boudoirs and restaurants, a sort of whirlpool of sovereigns in which we were caught, and sent eddying through music halls, bright shoulders, tresses of hair, and slang: and I joined in the admirable game of Bohemianism that was played around Piccadilly Circus, with Curzon Street for a magnificent rallying point. (184)

Bohemia, in its embodiment of all the anti-bourgeois elements that went to make up the decadent sensibility, was a necessary part of the decadent rebellion. Bohemianism was, as Moore argues, "if not a necessity" than "at least an adjuvant" in the "practical protest against the so-called decencies of life" (*Confessions* 139).

For all the sincerity with which the decadents rebelled against the capitalist Victorian middle class and with which they sought to distinguish themselves from the professionals who served this class, ultimately this rebellion served merely to confirm their middle-class status. Bohemia, as I have suggested above, was largely inhabited by those of the middle class who were desperately trying to mystify their origins by creating new social and class identities for themselves. Similarly, decadence was ultimately a middle-class project as Arthur Symons, himself a decadent product of the professional middle class, noted in 1899 in the quotation that heads this chapter: "Nothing, not even conventional virtue, is so provincial as conventional vice; and the desire to 'bewilder the middle classes' is itself middle-class" (*Symbolist* 4). The decadent sensibility then, despite its apparent valorization of aristocratic and working-class ideals, was a sensibility that could only have emerged from the middle class. Aristocrats and members of the working class would likely not have characterized themselves as the middle-class decadents did. The decadents appropriated idealized and largely imagined values--indeed "fictions"--of both the aristocratic and working-class, values that were fast disappearing as a national culture that was largely based on middle-class values was being formed.

There are many respects in which the decadents' rebellion merely implicated them more thoroughly in the very social and class structures that they were trying to escape from. Thus, though the decadents cultivated a dilettantism that exalted the new, the perverse, the exotic, and the arcane in an effort to remove themselves from the cycle of capitalist and commercial production, their dilettantism might also be read simply as an advanced form of what they sought to evade. As Rita Felski observes, the decadents participated in the "cult of novelty which propel[led] the logic of capitalist consumerism. . . . Thus the [decadent's] attempt to create a uniquely individual style reveals his inevitable reliance upon the very categories of evaluation against which he ostensibly pits himself. Similarly, while he affects a disdain for modern industrial and technological processes, these same processes form the taken-for-granted preconditions of his own pursuit of distinction and refined pleasures" (99).

Similarly, one might argue that the affected dilettantism of the decadent is not anti-professional but is, rather, an alternative form of professionalism. Both Freedman and Arata have made this kind of argument with respect to Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson. For Freedman, James's studied "urbane sophisticat[ion]" which is an attempt to counter Walter Besant's "overly professionalized professional" is simply an "idealizing" and "mystified" professionalism (178, 179). Similarly, for Arata, Stevenson's "hauteur regarding the reading public, as well as his commitment to the values of craft, of style, of culture and taste" might well function as "a way of asserting one's own more authentic professionalism" (46).

Can one read the decadents' dilettantism in these terms? It is certainly true that in asserting their dilettantism the decadents rejected their duty as professionals. That is, while they certainly possessed the "special knowledge and skills" that are characteristic of the professional, as dilettantes they did not, ostensibly, "attempt to translate [this] order of scarce resources . . . into another--[i.e.] social and economic rewards"--an act that Magali Sarfatti Larson argues is a key component of the definition of professionalism and that I would argue distinguishes the dilettante from the professional (xvii). And yet, the disavowal of social and economic rewards was an act that promised precisely those rewards it seemed to disavow in terms of the way the literary field was developing at this time (Bourdieu, *Field* 75). The decadents came of age at a point in time when, as Freedman notes, the "critique of commodification" was being commodified and "the role of the 'alienated artist' could (and did) achieve a considerable degree of financial success and social status in the very world whose utilitarian and moralistic ethos those writers and artists claimed to rebel against" (63, 54).

The fact that the alienated artist was popular among a middle class that enjoyed being abused complicates my earlier reading of the "*hypocrite lecteur*" trope. Though ostensibly used to signal the utter contempt and derision of the artist for the middle class, this trope also reveals the dependency of the decadent on the middle class. After all, the very act of addressing the middle-class reader indicates the necessity of that reader to the decadents who need their attacks against the middle class to be received by members of that class. Moreover, in the context of the popularity of the alienated artist figure, the address reveals the degree to which this audience is a paying audience. Thus, at the very moment that decadents attempted a definitive break with the middle class, they apparently revealed their dependency on and complicity with this class.

It is not my intention to undermine the sincerity of the decadents in their rebellion against a society that they regarded as corrupt. Within the social sphere, I would argue, the "fictions" of the decadent were largely sustainable. The decadents were quite successful at constructing an alternative social identity for themselves and of inhabiting their alternative social space and both this identity and social space were recognized as distinct by others. In terms of their work within the literary field and their careers, however, the cracks in the decadent "fictions" become more visible and are more susceptible to being exposed as the fictions that they are. The decadents, quite simply, were not aristocrats. They could not afford to exist as dilettantes outside the cycle of production no matter how much they wanted to. In taking positions within the literary field the decadents became producers who were subject to the conditions of the marketplace. Though as Bruce Gardiner notes, "English literary decadents may have dreamed like dandies . . . [they] had often to work like hacks, their works inscribed with material poverty and the fantastic banquets only the hungry can conjure up. The economy of the English decadence was a subsistence one of leisure longed for but business attended to, of literature ambiguously both a privileged occupation and a badly paid job" ("Decadence" 36). The decadent fiction of the period and the careers of the decadents that I will go on to discuss in the next part of this dissertation embody all these contradictions that were a part of the "decadent sensibility" that emerged in the 1880s and 1890s as decadents sought to construct an alternative social identity in response to the tensions within the middle class.

Part 1

Towards a Materialist History of Decadence

Chapter 2

Decadent Positionings: Decadence and the Conditions of Production in the Literary Field

> I believe . . . there is . . . abundant evidence in favour of the view that the greater number of [decadent books] are not the outcome of any spontaneous impulse whatsoever . . . but of a deliberate intention to win notoriety and its cash accompaniment by an appeal to the sensual instincts of the baser or vulgarer portion of the reading public. (James Ashcroft Noble, "The Fiction of Sexuality," 1895)

> [T]hy heart was too full of too pure an ideal, too far removed from all possible contagion with the base crowd. . . . Never before was there so sudden a flux and conflux of artistic desire, such aspiration in the soul of man, such rage of passion, such fainting fever, such cerebral erethism. . . . [T]hy holy example didst save us [Symbolists and Decadents] from all base commercialism, from all hateful prostitution; thou wert ever our high priest. (George Moore on Ernest Cabaner in *Confessions of a Young Man*, 1888)[1]

Like Arthur Symons's insistence on the inherently bourgeois nature of the decadent project, James Ashcroft Noble's accusation--that the decadents were far from disinterested and were not, moreover, motivated by any form of artistic "spontaneous impulse" but were rather intentionally appealing to a mass audience--goes against the grain of a common understanding of the decadent artist. This common understanding represents yet another "fiction" of decadence, the familiar one of the second quotation, a fiction that has prevailed in literary histories of decadence. In this "fiction," the decadent appears as the disinterested martyr to art who shuns a mass audience, writing only for those few who appreciate true art.

My intention in this chapter is not so much to privilege one of these interpretations over the other but rather to understand the relationship between them. After all, Noble's view has as much truth and fiction in it as the image he wishes to supplant. Instead, I intend to examine how these fictions came to be constructed, how the material conditions of the British *fin de siècle* literary field made it possible for such diametrically opposed images of the decadent to circulate at the same time. What is the relationship between the decadent writers and popular writers and between decadence and popular commercial fiction? And how might this relationship force us to rethink the "fiction" of decadence as élite art that has become part of our common understanding?

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[1] Cabaner was a French composer (1833-1881) of a decadent bent. He was interested in the concept of synaesthesia and attempted in his music to paint with notes. He dedicated work and set to music lyrics by his poet friends--Arthur Rimbaud, Charles Cros, and Theodore de Banville, precursors of the French decadent school.

These discrepancies in the representation of the decadent form part of a larger contest between agents within the literary field--a field that, as Bourdieu claims, is always a "site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer" (*Field* 42). In the quotations above, Noble and Moore are in agreement that commercialism degrades art and that something that might be described as idealistic artistic inspiration (Noble's "spontaneous inspiration" and Moore's "pure ideal," "artistic desire," "aspiration," etc. etc.) should constitute the dominant definition of the writer. But here, agreement on basic principles does not mean accord. Noble's attack on decadents, in which he undermines their claims to artistic integrity by accusing them of money-grubbing, reveals the way struggles within the field are played out as agents manipulate the terms of the debate in order to place themselves in a superior hierarchical position and their opponents in an inferior one. Noble's comments on the decadents, for example, reduce them to the level of popular writers, writers for the masses, while at the same time elevating him to the status of the critic who is not only able to confer value on works but who can also expose those who inauthentically claim to be creators of high art.

In their emphasis on the oppositional relationship between high artistic aesthetics and money interests, Moore's and Noble's statements address the main points of contention in the battle for cultural authority in the literary field of the 1880s and 1890s. Another significant issue around which points of contention emerged was ethics--the ethical function of literature. Ethics, aesthetics, and economics--these were among the central issues in defining the position of a writer within the literary field in the 1880s and 1890s, a field that was, like the social sphere, becoming increasingly commercialized and professionalized. Broadly, this chapter challenges the idealistic high art representation of the decadent by focusing on certain material realities of the literary field and by exploring the complex relationship between the decadent and the popular.

In the first section of this chapter, I will describe the structure of the literary field of the 1880s and 1890s and examine how ethics, aesthetics, and economics figured in the battle for cultural authority between decadents and their opponents in the context of an increasingly commercialized and professionalized literary field. More particularly, I will demonstrate how these issues figured in the construction of competing images of the decadent artist with a focus on the relationship of the decadent artist to the category of the popular. In its discussion of ethics, aesthetics, and economics, this section introduces issues that will be developed more fully throughout the dissertation as I examine the production and reception of decadent fiction. The second section develops the argument about the relationship between the decadent and the popular, offering the beginnings of what I call the alternative literary origins of decadence by exploring the influence of writers like George Meredith and Robert Louis Stevenson--writers not normally associated with decadence--on decadent writers. Finally, in the third section, I turn my attention away from the decadents to the publishers of decadence in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship of the decadents to the popular by demonstrating the degree to which publishers shaped the form decadence would take in the British literary context.

I

Ethics, Aesthetics, and Economics and the Battle for Cultural Authority in the *fin de siècle* Literary Field

The issues of contention that dominated the literary field of the 1880s and 1890s--aesthetics, economics, and ethics, were, in many respects, an effect of specific social, technological, and economic changes that contributed to a transformation of the literary field. While the decadents were in the process of constructing a social identity in opposition to the dominant capitalist middle-class Victorian ideology, the literary field which the decadents, as aspiring writers, were on the verge of entering, was becoming increasingly commercialized. This change was wrought by technological advances in printing and communication, by the repeal of duties on advertising (1853), stamps (1855) and paper (1860), by an increase in the disposable income of middle-class families, and also by social reform--the Education Acts of the 1870s and 1880s in particular. The Education Acts resulted in a significant increase in the literacy rate in Britain. Even if, as Raymond Williams has argued, this increased literacy did not reflect an actual growth in the reading public, its effects on the literary field were nonetheless as though there had indeed emerged a whole new mass of readers (*Long Revolution* 188).[2] In response to this apparent growth of the reading public and enabled by advances in printing and cheaper production costs, the amount of newspapers and of magazines published increased significantly in the period from 1875-1914.[3] There was also a comparable increase in the amount of cheap fiction produced. Though the expensive three-volume novel format dominated fiction publishing until the mid 1890s, the Education Acts resulted in the production of cheap reprints of classics and books that had fallen out of copyright. In addition, one volume reprints of popular three-volume works were now being published sooner after the first edition than had previously been the case. In some instances through the 1880s and 1890s, writers increasingly bypassed the three volume system altogether, publishing cheap first editions in one volume format.

These developments in the literary field greatly increased opportunities for writers by opening up new venues for publishing and by creating more jobs in journalism, a profession that had long had a symbiotic relationship with literature.[4] In addition, the proliferation of newspapers and periodicals created a demand for the creative work of writers of both short stories and, with development of syndication in the late 1870s, novels in serialized form. Though these developments opened up the literary field a great deal, the opportunities were more favourable to those writers who aspired to popular success or who engaged in literature with a missionary zeal. Walter Besant, for example, was enthusiastic about the new mass readership and in *The Pen and the Book* (1899) expressed his belief that the cheap reading matter this audience was engaged in reading represented the first step on the road to improvement "out of which the stronger and keener mind will presently emerge" (qtd. in Cross 205). To the decadents and other literary intellectuals, however, these new writing opportunities represented the very antithesis of what they stood for, opposed as these writers were to anything produced for consumption by the masses. To the dilettante decadents, literary art, in the context of these developments within the field, was reduced to a mere trade. It was hard to "cultivate literature" in the way that Arthur Machen claimed to do when one was engaged in journalism of "the more or less literary kind"--i.e. writing "turnovers" and stories for the newspapers and periodicals (*Things Near and Far* 96, 126). Far from being a refuge from the embourgeoisement of Victorian society, the late-Victorian literary field seemed, from the point of view of the decadents, merely to reproduce the situation of the social field. In its crass commercialism, the literary field was unwelcoming to the newly constructed decadent social identity and the highbrow culture he endorsed.

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[2] Williams argues that the increase in the production of newspapers and cheap reading material made possible by the Education Acts had far more of an impact on the already literate middle classes than on the newly literate working classes. He bases his argument on the fact that the "reading public" did not expand as significantly as it should have given the estimates for literacy rates. "The true history [of these changes]," he asserts "is much more the bringing of cheaper reading matter to the already literate part of the population" (188).

[3] The number of newspapers published in the British Isles rose from 1609 in 1875 to 2504 in 1914; the number of weekly, monthly and quarterly periodicals listed at 643 in 1875 rose to 1298 by 1885 and to 2081 by 1895 (Keating 34).

[4] For a description of this association between journalism and the literary life see "Bohemia in Fleet Street," Chapter 3 of Nigel Cross's *The Common Writer* (90-125).

If the commercialism of the literary field ran counter to the decadent sensibility, so too did the increasing tendency towards the professionalization of authorship. Paramount among the moves towards this professionalization was the establishment of the Society of Authors in 1883 by Walter Besant. Besant founded the society in an effort to protect authors' rights in the newly expanded and commercialized field of literature. To the decadents who had deliberately constructed themselves as anti-professional because they regarded professionals as increasingly under the influence of the capitalist middle class, Besant's professionalism, with its emphasis on literary "property" and on the commercial aspects of literary production, must also have seemed inextricably linked with the ideology of bourgeois capitalism. While the Society claimed to respect the differences between the literary and commercial value of a work and aimed to help both the best-selling author and the writer who cared more about art than money, critics of Besant were unable to see beyond the "vulgar and greedy" tradesmanlike nature of Besant's schemes (Keating 29). Moreover, as Peter Keating points out, the Society's efforts ultimately favoured the kind of writers that Besant felt were "the real victims of commercialization" chief among whom were the "anonymous providers of entertainment or instruction for hundreds of thousands of readers of cheaply produced novels . . . religious in tone or romantic" (48, 47). To the decadents, these kinds of writers were more likely to be regarded as conspirators in the commercialization of literature rather than as victims of it.

These new aspects of the literary field of the 1880s and 90s--the expansion of the press, the increase in the production of cheap literature, and the growth of the reading public--along with corresponding developments in the literary field like the establishment of the Society of Authors--resulted in what seemed to many intellectuals, the decadents among them, to be a complete degradation of literary culture. The reaction of decadents and other intellectuals against this degradation led to what Andreas Huyssen calls "the Great Divide"--"the kind of discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture" (viii)--the discourse invoked by both Noble and Moore in the quotations that head this chapter. This divide had ramifications in both social and literary terms. On the one hand, it effected the kind of class division I have described in the previous chapter whereby decadents, breaking from their own class, defined their "superior" culture in opposition to an "inferior" bourgeois middle-class culture. On the other hand, it pitted writer against writer in what Nigel Cross has described as a "schism . . . in the bourgeois literary world" between middle-brow and high-brow literature (216). This "schism," Cross argues, originated in the mid-1880s. Up until this point, the

> distinction between the popular and the profound had been almost unknown to mid-Victorian writers. Serious literature, brimming with moral and social issues, had made no apology for its popularity. No one suggested that Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* were not literature because they contained ideas which found a wide and receptive audience. But in the 1880s changes in the price and distribution of books allowed readers to exercise a much more direct choice in their reading matter. (216)

This schism would define the terms on which the struggle for cultural authority within the field would be based. In the context of a literary field that seemed increasingly contaminated by the effects of a bourgeois and consumer culture, it became more important than ever to distinguish between kinds of writer, particularly for those like the decadents who sought to distance themselves from writers who catered to the tastes of the bourgeois middle class and the masses.

In many respects, then, the literary field of the 1880s and 1890s and the situation of the decadents within it was analogous to the social sphere I described in the previous chapter. In the literary field, the decadents, as they had done in the social realm, defined themselves in terms of their opponents. In the case of the social realm, this opponent was the bourgeois middle class and, to a certain extent, the professional class whose ideals were being abandoned by the decadents; within the literary field, the enemy was the popular writer, the equivalent within the literary realm of the capitalist middle class. What had appeared as a conflict between intellectual and capitalist ideals in Victorian society was, in the literary field, a conflict between two kinds of writers: producers of autonomous art (decadents and others associated with the literary élite) and producers of literature for the marketplace (popular writers), each with their own ideas of literary and cultural value.

A simple structural model of the literary field of the 1880s and 1890s would place the decadents, as proponents of art-for art's sake, in what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "sub-field of restricted production" and what I will more generally refer to in this dissertation as the "literary élite" (*Field* 115-21). The positions in this sub-field represent the literary equivalent of the professional intellectual and of the decadent within Victorian society. Both are guided by a rejection of middle class values, values that those among the literary élite tend to associate with popular writers. Perhaps most significantly, the writers of the literary élite disavow economic interest, a trait they associate with the commercial and capitalist values of the middle class. They also reject the moral and didactic function of literature, associating this didacticism, once again, with bourgeois ideas about art. Instead, these writers define success in aesthetic terms and deem recognition by peers and worthy critics as marks of success. They envision their audience as the like-minded few ideal readers invoked by Walter Pater, George Moore, and other decadent writers and certainly not as the mass readership that arose in the wake of the Education Acts. This is the field in which, ideally, "producers produce for other producers" (Bourdieu, *Field* 39). Under these terms, we might include in this sub-field the high art of the 1880s and 1890s including aestheticism, impressionism and symbolism, and the publishers, critics, printers, and others involved in the production and distribution of literature that form a support network for the production of high art. Here we might think of writers like George Moore and W. B. Yeats, publishing houses like the Bodley Head, the Kelmscott

Press, and Leonard Smithers, critics like Walter Pater and Arthur Symons, and printers like Emery Walker and Charles Ricketts.

This same structural model would place popular writers broadly within what Bourdieu calls "the sub-field of large-scale production," a sub-field where extra-literary criteria often determine value (*Field* 125-31). Here economic principles prevail, success depends on sales and size of audience, and works are "entirely defined by their public" (Bourdieu, *Field* 125). In the minds of the decadents and others among the literary élite, these writers are the equivalent of the capitalist middle-class bourgeoisie that they despise and indeed, popular writers often share the social, cultural, and political values of the dominant class whom they identify as their audience. In the context of the literary field of the 1880s and 1890s, best-selling writers like Marie Corelli and Hall Caine, publishers of popular novels and cheap editions like Hutchinson and George Newnes, and major distributors of popular fiction like Mudie's circulating library and booksellers like W. H. Smith best exemplify the principles and values of this sub-field. It is in this sub-field that we tend to find those writers who endorse the moral and didactic functions of literature.

This description of the hierarchical structure of the British literary field of the 1880s and 1890s is, as I have suggested, a simplistic model, broadly accurate in general descriptive terms, but failing to account for a number of complexities that affect the position of a writer within the literary field. As a static representation it does not account for the dynamic way in which the field operates under specific historical, cultural, and social conditions to which it is subjected. For example, it does not consider how, in jockeying for position, writers often undermine other writers' claims by manipulating the terms of debate in a self-serving fashion, as Noble does in his condemnation of the decadents. Nor does this brief sketch acknowledge the vast space in between these two extreme poles of the field--those positions in which one finds a wide array of works and of producers of works which cannot be said to conform strictly to the principles of the two extreme positions as I have laid them out. It is in these spaces, I would argue, that, if we examine closely enough a writer's mediations within the field, we find most writers and their works. Furthermore, the model as described presents a unified vision of the two extremes of the literary field when, in actual fact, there was often division within each of the poles. Not all popular writers shared exactly the same values. Similarly, the literary élite was divided in a manner akin to the division between decadents and the professional intellectuals within the social sphere.[5] These are among the kinds of complications I will bring to my reading of the British *fin de siècle* literary field as I examine how the issues of aesthetics, ethics, and economics were engaged with as decadents and their opponents struggled to impose the dominant definition of writer and battled for cultural authority within the literary field.

The simple structural model of the hierarchical nature of the literary field distinguishes between the decadents of the literary élite and popular writers in terms of sharp dichotomies between an aesthetic and monetary economy and between aesthetic and didactic or moralistic intentions. But these basic aesthetic, economic, and ethical principles were brought into play by writers in complicated ways. Neither of these groups wholly conformed to the supposed dominating principles of their respective positions within the field. Popular writers, for example, were not likely to accede to the view, imposed by the literary élite, that they were wholly motivated by monetary greed. To a great extent, popular writers often internalized the hierarchical principles of the literary élite while nonetheless interpreting them within their own framework of values. Marie Corelli, for example, was a popular writer who, like those among the literary élite, valorized high art and claimed to be economically disinterested. She differed from those among the literary élite, however, in her belief that aesthetic superiority was determined by size of audience as well as in her belief that aesthetic effects went hand in hand with didactic and moralistic intentions. This blend of élitist and popular views on aesthetics, economics, and ethics--come together in her comments on the reading public whose literary tastes she believed were surpassing those of the so-called élite as a result of the effects of universal education:

> No author of old time ever had such a magnificent audience as now--an

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[5] Peter McDonald makes this point about divisions within the élite in his study of the field in this period, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880-1914*. He discusses the antagonisms between the W. E. Henley circle and the decadent and new woman coterie that gathered around John Lane. Even though they shared many similar literary values, McDonald argues, they were battling over a dominant position within the literary élite: "The primary contest was over status positions *within* the 'Republic of Letters' between majors and minors, the established and the newcomers, the 'real' and the 'apparent' men of letters" (37).

> audience moved by all sorts of embryo heroisms, emotions, progressive ideas and fine perceptions, and ready for anything that will help them think a little higher, or lift them up out of the merely sordid ways of life wherein they find themselves frequently exhausted, disheartened, or despairing. It is a privilege to work for such a public; and when it is pleased, satisfied, comforted, or moved in any way of nobleness, however slight, by what one has done, the reward is great though it is not discovered in a mere 'cash question' or in newspaper notoriety. ("'Barabbas'--and After" 134)

Although there is no mistaking the missionary zeal which marks Corelli as decidedly "bourgeois" in her thinking, her invocation of qualities associated with the literary élite and of their art ("progressive ideas," "fine perceptions," as well as her claim to disinterestedness) indicates her understanding of what determines value within élite circles and of her desire to position herself among this élite. This desire, however, does not prevent her from putting her own spin on the high literary aesthetic terms she invokes. Clearly, as the context of the passage suggests, she has a different understanding of what might constitute "progressive ideas" and "fine perceptions" than that of the decadents. Thus, at the same time that she seemingly accepts the principles of high art as defined by the élite, she also attempts to bring them within her own framework in order to assert her idea of the dominant definition of writer over that of the decadents.

Corelli bolstered her claim to artistic superiority by undermining the high artistic claims of the decadents and by charging them with economic interestedness in a manner similar to that taken by Noble. Corelli was notorious for her attacks against the decadents whom she referred to disparagingly as the "little poets," the "new poets," and the "exclusive set" of the "Ishbosheth." Corelli accused these writers of money-grubbing in a number of venues including her novel *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895) in which Prince Rimânez, advising an aspiring author, declares, "if your book were a judicious mixture of Zola, Huysmans, and Baudelaire . . . it would be sure of a success in these days of new Sodom and Gomorrah" (50).[6] Corelli combines an ethical with an economic critique here accusing the decadents of writing lurid tales in order to appeal to the baser instincts of the masses. In the novel, Corelli contrasts what she presents as the superior aesthetic values of her female protagonist Mavis Clare, whose writing has an uplifting effect on readers, over those of the kinds of pernicious writers that are favoured by Sybil, the protagonist's wife. A similar tactic was adopted by other writers, particularly women writers who, in their works represented decadents not as the intellectual geniuses of a literary avant-garde but as inadequate, shallow, or superficial men, frequently in contrast to positively represented female artist figures. Through these representations, representations which I will discuss in the next part of this dissertation, women writers like Corelli, Lee, and Grand rejected the dominant principles of the literary field and try to redefine the qualities that endow a writer with symbolic capital.

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[6] Corelli coined these terms to describe decadents in her various attacks on modern literary schools (*Free Opinions* 252-61; *The Sorrows of Satan* 125-26). In "The 'Strong' Book of the Ishbosheth" (*Free Opinions* 245-51), Corelli appropriates the term Ishbosheth ("man of shame") to describe the writers of pernicious novels of the time.

It is no coincidence that women have figured so centrally so far in my discussion of critiques of decadence. The aesthetic, ethical, and economic discourses that dominated all poles of the literary field at this time were highly gendered. Women writers, even those among the literary élite, tended to be uneasy with aesthetic principle of art-for-art's sake so strongly endorsed by male aesthetes and decadents. Women writers, on the contrary, often believed that literature ought to serve some form of ethical function--from the broadly moralistic kind to the more specific didactic kind that engaged with social issues. These beliefs went against the grain of the decadent sensibility, though decadents were certainly not alone among the literary élite in their condemnation of women writers. In their privileging of autonomous art, the decadents and others among the literary élite equated women's writing with the mass-produced cheap literature and the three-volume novels that threatened to degrade literature and that they felt dominated the literary field. As Lyn Pykett, who has written at length on the position of women writers within the literary field, argues, women novelists "compromis[ed] both the novel's claim as a serious art form and its possibilities for aesthetic development" (*Engendering* 55). To the decadents, women writers' crimes against art were two-fold: they compromised art by writing commercial fiction for money and by approaching literature with the missionary zeal of the social reformer or moralist, an act which compromised the artistic autonomy insisted on by the decadents.

But if the decadents and other members of the literary élite felt that women writers dominated the literary field, this was not a feeling shared by these women writers who, though they may have been endowed with more economic capital, strongly desired the symbolic capital that was largely the property of the male literary élite. Corelli, for example, struggled to try to achieve this symbolic capital throughout her career, particularly early on when she attempted to gain recognition from the decadents she claimed to despise. She had high artistic aspirations, for example, for her novel *Wormwood* (1890), the story of a French decadent absinthe-addicted writer. There is evidence to suggest that Corelli regarded this novel as a genuine foray into the realm of high art in its engagement with the important and controversial issues of decadence, aesthetics, ethics, and "realism" in literature. Not only did Corelli send a copy of the novel as "a tribute" to Arthur Symons, decadent poet and promoter of French literature and the literary avant-garde, she also bestowed extensive praise within the novel upon the French decadent poet and absinthe addict, Charles Cros.[7] Though the novel is moralistic in tone, in keeping with Corelli's view that writers should educate and uplift their readers, clearly she believed that its aesthetic qualities would appeal to those among the literary élite. She believed that she could write a book that was at once commercially and artistically successful.

A similar desire for symbolic capital seems also to have prompted Robert Hichens to write *The Green Carnation* (1894), a satire of decadence and the cult of Oscar Wilde that launched Hichens's career as a minor popular novelist. Hichens was probably one of the few male writers who admired Corelli's work. In a review of one of her books, Hichens wrote "she always puts into her work the same peculiar and abnormal vitality--a vitality that never flags or falters, that seems, indeed, to grow, like a fire fanned by the bellows of discussion" (qtd. in Vyver 149).[8] Hichens's admiration of Corelli is a function, I would suggest, of the similar positions they held within the literary field of the 1890s. Like Corelli, Hichens's position within the literary field was a complex one. He too was a popular writer who valorized high art and claimed to be commercially disinterested. "Sincerity," he wrote in his autobiography, "is the keynote of lasting success. . . . But how many writers are insincere and only out to catch, if possible, what they think of as 'the taste of the public.' They deserve to fail, and though sometimes they make easy money they never gain lasting fame" (*Yesterday* 51). But the seeming contradictions in the positions of Corelli and Hichens are only contradictory from the viewpoint of their opponents among the literary élite for whom popular success and artistic integrity are incompatible. Corelli and Hichens are, after all, only espousing the law of the field (the disavowal of economic interest), a law equally true for both popular and avant-garde writers, though some popular writers, it is true, do claim to write for money. In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu claims it is wrong to describe the seemingly contradictory positions of bourgeois or popular writers like Corelli and Hichens as the result of a "conscious calculation" (94). Rather, he describes this situation as the result of a "homology between the writer's . . . position within the literary field and the position of his or her audience in the field of the classes and class fractions" (94):

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[7] Symons mentions this receipt of Corelli's novel in a letter to his friend Katharine Willard dated February 20, 1891: "a letter has come from Marie Corelli, saying she is sending me one of her novels as "a tribute of" etc. etc.!" (Symons, *Selected Letters* 76).

> The so-called *écrivains de service*, whose opponents accuse them of being the servants of the bourgeoisie, are justified in protesting that strictly speaking they serve no one: they serve objectively only because, with total sincerity, in full unawareness of what they are doing, they serve their own interests, i.e. specific interests, highly sublimated and euphemized (94).

Corelli and Hichens are therefore sincere in their claims because they write as they want to write and regard it as high art while at the same time achieving popularity.

The ambivalence displayed towards the decadents by popular writers like Corelli was also felt by many of those who occupied positions alongside the decadents in the literary élite. Here, accusations of spurious artistry and money-grubbing also circulated as those within the literary élite struggled for dominance of the dominant pole of the field. Not all literary intellectuals shared the same values and ideals and, just as decadents had represented a particular kind of intellectual within the social sphere, so too they often differed from their peers in the literary field. For W. E. Henley, who shared the decadent disgust with the increasing commercialism of the literary field, John Lane's Bodley Head enterprise, which was founded largely on the work of decadent writers, exposed the "coxcombery of limited editions" (qtd. in McDonald 37). In "The Fogey Speaks," a February 1894 article in the *National Observer*, an organ for Henleyites, a

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[8] Vyver does not provide the source of the article.

claim was made for the sham artistry and the money-grubbing nature of the so-called high art decadent enterprise: "Why should we criticise in a spirit of seriousness the myriad poetasters who inflate their own value by shrieking that only two hundred and fifty copies of their works may be distributed among the clamouring public? The artifice is old and tiresome . . . They are here to-day, because their bookseller, who has influence with a morning paper, and understands the profitable planting of garbage, chooses to sell them" (qtd. in McDonald 37-38). Henley was not the only one who regarded Bodley Head publications and artists with suspicion. T. P. Gill, a literary columnist for T. P. O'Connor's *Weekly Sun*, advised George Egerton in a private letter to avoid the decadent coterie that centred around John Lane: "I wish you were not going to the d----- Odd Volumes Coroboree [sic]. They are a third-rate crowd. . . . don't make yourself one of that horrible world of penny-a-liners and guinea-a-versers and city shopkeepers. And above all don't be led about that world with the little man Lane for a bear-leader. . . . I am anxious about the effect of this matter upon your *work*--your *art*" (Egerton 29-30).

The sense, then, that the decadents' claims to high artistry were spurious was not particular to Noble or to popular writers. It was a prevalent view held by the more obvious opponents of decadence within the popular sphere but also by intellectuals within the literary field. For both popular writers and for opponents of decadence within the literary élite, this "exposure" of the decadent project served to assert their own superiority within the literary field. And yet, even if popular writers and certain members of the literary élite were justified in their accusations that decadents engaged in salacious and scandalous work not because of high artistic ideals but rather for profit, they too benefited from the popularity and trendiness of 1890s decadence. How else are we to account for the way with which decadence was taken up by popular writers and the mainstream press and marketed to the masses? Popular novels featuring decadents abounded in the period and the pages of middle-brow periodicals were filled with parodies of decadence. *Punch*, for example, ran series' through 1894 entitled "Our decadents" and "Our Female Decadents" and frequently featured parodies of *Yellow Book* contributors. Included among these parodies were "1894" by Max Mereboom, a parody of Max Beerbohm's *Yellow Book* article of July 1895 entitled "1880" and many others including numerous parodies of Aubrey Beardsley's work. And certainly the financial advantages of discussions of decadence were not lost on the sensational new journalists like "The Philistine" whose rage against "The New Fiction" in the *Westminster Gazette* in early 1895 stirred up a great deal of controversy and sold large numbers of newspapers. Like those critics of decadence in the sub-field of large-scale production, avant-garde critics of decadence like Henley also seemed lured by the financial rewards inherent in the fad for decadence. Under Henley's editorship, the *National Observer* published G. S. Street's *Autobiography of a Boy*, a satire of the decadent dandy, that was later published by Henley's foe John Lane at the Bodley Head.

The appropriation of decadence by popular writers and by the press was essentially a continuation of the interest in the alienated artist figure that had begun with the aesthetic craze of the 1880s. That the decadents merited attention in various forms of popular media consumed by the middle-class public certainly seems to validate the claims that the decadents were in reality savvy publicity seekers and, in addition, compromises their ability to represent themselves as disinterested. Or does it? Was their popular appeal the fault of the decadents and how popular was this appeal really? In reality, this popularity probably did more for the popularized representations of the decadent artist figure than it ever did for the work of the decadents themselves. One only has to compare the sales figures of Corelli's *Wormwood* or *Sorrows of Satan*--both of which feature decadent artists--with those of any work by the decadents to realize the relativity of the term "popular" in this period. Where Corelli's books sold in the tens of thousands, a good sale of a decadent work was a couple of thousand.[9] The decadents were perceived to be more popular than they really were partly because of all the press attention they received and partly because of how they figured prominently in works of popular writers like Corelli. But these popular representations were about as close to decadence as most of the British reading public ever got.

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[9] Perhaps the highest selling decadent works of the period were the first issue of the *Yellow Book* which sold about 6,500 copies and George Egerton's *Keynotes*, a work that was linked in the press with decadent fiction and which sold about 6,000 copies in a period of about a year. But these were exceptional cases. Even Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* was far from a big seller. Five years after the book version appeared, the publishers still had stock remaining from the original small print run of 1000 (Guy and Small 57). In *The Early Nineties*, James G. Nelson gives a detailed account of print and sales figures for Bodley Head works published before the break-up of John Lane.

Despite the apparently fictional nature of their popularity, a popularity that benefited popular writers and the press more than it did the decadents, the decadents were certainly not immune to the lures of writing for money, though certainly they represented their engagement in this kind of literary work in strikingly different terms than their opponents did. Whereas the opponents of decadence claimed that decadent writers were money-grubbing in their production of what they professed was high art, decadents made a careful distinction between their art and hack writing. Writers like John Davidson, Arthur Symons, and Lionel Johnson complained about "pot-boiling" in reviews and in other kinds of prose writing because it detracted from their purist aims. Symons, for example, in an 1887 letter to a friend, distinguished between his poetry which he considered his "life's work" and the prose writing that he was "obliged to do--for money" and feared that his high-profile status as a critic would have a negative impact on people's perception of him as a poet (qtd. in Gardiner, *Rhymers'* 85). Even Johnson, who, as Gardiner notes, "had private means" and was far from poor, complained to a friend, "[I] do not recommend literature from the pecuniary side. . . . At present, I have given up the idea of it, and must stick to pot-boiling in the reviews" (qtd. in Gardiner, *Rhymers'* 77). The decadents made a virtue of necessity and, rather than letting their hack work serve to undermine their artistic credibility, they used it to further their image as artistic martyrs.

Though some decadents, like Davidson, really did depend on hack work for the money it brought them, the fact that even those, like Johnson, who probably did not need to pot-boil, adopted this attitude points to the importance of the notion of artistic martyrdom to the decadents' self-representation. Clearly, for those decadent writers with rather handsome yearly incomes that I discussed in the previous chapter, the needy artist-martyr pose was a way of mystifying work that, if not necessary for their survival, was essential to establishing important connections and associations in order to further the artistic side of their careers. After all, with the exception of Davidson, much of whose hack work consisted of ghost-writing popular novels, the hack work was reviewing. Reviewing was hardly the kind of hack work that threatened to undermine one's artistic credibility. Rather, it was the kind of hack work that could only enhance the decadent's legitimacy and authority within the field by asserting his power to consecrate and give value to literary works.

But were the decadents really as opposed to popularity and commercial success as their views of hack-work seem to suggest? Some, like Richard Le Gallienne, were more sanguine about the seemingly contradictory positions of the artist as purist and the artist as money-maker. Le Gallienne quite happily occupied a number of contradictory positions within the literary field. He was at once a columnist for the *Star*--one of the leading papers of the "new journalism" that catered to the masses, a member of the Rhymers' Club--a coterie of 1890s poets including W. B. Yeats, Ernest Dowson, and Arthur Symons, and a writer of both decadent and anti-decadent poems. Le Gallienne took an opportunistic view of his "hacking" and used his position as a journalist for a popular newspaper to promote the decadent "minor poets" of the literary élite. Others like Ernest Dowson, Arthur Machen, M. P. Shiel, and John Davidson wrote fiction which was highly indebted to popular genres--the society novel in Dowson's case, the romantic comedy in the case of Davidson, the gothic and Stevensonian romance in the case of Machen, Shiel and Davidson, and the detective story in the case of Shiel--works which I will discuss in the second part of the dissertation.

Generally this work is accounted for in literary history by accepting at face value the claims of decadents regarding hack work. Consequently, it is largely ignored. The poems of Dowson and Davidson--work regarded as having literary merit and having been approached as such by the two writers--are given ample consideration in histories of decadence where their novels are virtually ignored. Dowson has come to represent the quintessential struggling commercially disinterested decadent artist, one who, as Yeats declared in *The Trembling of the Veil*, "had made it a matter of conscience to turn from any kind of money-making that prevented good writing" (qtd. in Flower and Maas 4). This kind of statement obscures Dowson's very real involvement and indeed interest in the kind of writing for money he engaged in in his novel-writing. Yeats's economically disinterested Dowson is very different from the Dowson who, in his excitement regarding his novel-writing collaborations with Arthur Moore, writes of "inherit[ing] the Kingdom of--Mudie!" (*Letters* 37).

In a like manner, Machen and Shiel are generally invisible from histories of decadence because their works go against the grain of the image of decadence as an avant-garde precursor to modernism. But these writers were, as I will argue, invested in these works which they hoped would be commercial and artistic successes. Furthermore, they were perceived as decadent within their time. Far from ignoring them then, we need to examine more thoroughly the decadent stance on the "popular." In truth, though the decadents made great claims for their artistic martyrdom, their aesthetic idealism, their economic disinterestedness, and their hatred of the masses, none of them were averse to the rewards popularity might bring provided they could achieve these rewards without sacrificing too much of their artistic integrity. Just like Corelli, though beginning from the other side of the literary field, the decadents were interested in producing work that was both artistically, critically and commercially successful and were therefore willing to mediate between the claims of high art and the claims of the marketplace.

II

Some Alternative Literary Origins of Decadence: George Meredith and Robert Louis Stevenson

Before going on to discuss the attempts by decadents to produce work that was both artistically and commercially successful, a subject I will take up in the next part of the dissertation, I want to discuss the models that the decadents had in mind for producing this kind of work and to put forth a few examples of literary influences which complicate a traditional literary history of decadence. In this traditional literary history, writers like Algernon Swinburne, Walter Pater, D. G. Rossetti, Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, J.-K. Huysmans, Paul Verlaine, and Gustave Flaubert figure prominently as important influences on the development of British decadence. And indeed, such literary models were frequently espoused by British writers of decadence for whom they represented the artistic aspirations and artistic commitedness that denoted the true artist. But the literary tastes of the writers associated with British decadence were often far more eclectic than they have been made out to be. Studies that have tried to position decadence as a precursor to modernism within the literary canon have tended to ignore or marginalize the eclectic interests of the British decadents, interests that cannot be easily accommodated into a master narrative of literary inheritance. The decadents' interest in writers like George Meredith and Robert Louis Stevenson, for example, writers who hold relatively minor positions within the literary canon, complicates this narrative greatly.

Though seemingly strange bedfellows for the young aspiring writers of the 1890s, Meredith and Stevenson figure consistently as influences among decadent writers. Of the two, Meredith had the less visible influence on the fiction writing of the decadents, though many of the decadents recognized in Meredith qualities that would come to be associated with decadence. Most of all, however, Meredith was an important role model for the decadents in more abstract terms--as one who had conducted himself in an uncompromising fashion in the literary field and who had reaped the benefits of his noble dedication to his art.

Meredith is mentioned in glowing terms by nearly all of the writers associated with decadence. Ernest Dowson admired Meredith's style immensely as he wrote to his friend and collaborator Arthur Moore in 1889: "He is freer from the slightest taint of sentiment than anybody I know brilliantly clever--& hard and cold as a piece of crystal" (*Letters* 88). So too did John Davidson who admired his poetry immensely and thought him "the foremost man of letters in England" (qtd. in Townsend 116).[10] M. P. Shiel thought Meredith "the greatest stylist apart from genius" and in 1938 declared him the "best deceased English novelist" (qtd. in Morse, *Works* 435, 436), while Robert Hichens thought Meredith's *Ordeal of Richard Feveral* "one of the most gloriously English novels ever written" (*Yesterday* 54).[11] And though Arthur Machen would, in the 1920s, go on to express his distaste for Meredith's "obscure affectations, convolutions, [and] complexities of his diction," he admitted that in the 1890s he had "venerated Meredith . . . by rumour": "I had heard of both [Meredith and Pater] that they were very great and subtle doctors of literature, who demanded high & subtle qualities in those who read them. Of course I knew that I must possess such qualities, & was quite sure that I should appreciate the two masters" (*A Few Letters* 32). Machen's admission of "veneration by rumour" attests to the power Meredith's name had among the decadent aspirants to the literary élite and also to the importance placed by the young élite on cultivating a refined literary taste in the establishment of a credible artistic identity. Arthur Symons even went so far as to include Meredith among the decadents in an essay which first appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1897. In the essay, in which Symons praises Meredith highly for his style, he argues that Meredith's writing is characteristically "decadent" in its "learned corruption of language by which style ceases to be organic, and becomes, in the pursuit of some new expressiveness or beauty, deliberately abnormal" ("A Note" 149).

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[10] Davidson sent copies of his own work to Meredith. The University of Alberta Library, for example, owns a copy of Davidson's *In a Music Hall* which has been inscribed to Meredith from Davidson.

[11] Shiel's comments on Meredith appear in his copy of a book called *Really and Truly: A Book of Literary Confessions, Designed by a Late Victorian* (1915). The book consisted of replies to a questionnaire on literary likes and dislikes by Victor Cunard, Cecil Sprigge, Sacheverell Sitwell, T. T. Barnard, Henry Dundas, Ivor Spencer-Churchill, Angus Holden, R.H.S. Spicer, Riette Neilson, and Osbert Sitwell. Shiel provided his own responses to the questions which he dated December 4, 1938.

In many respects, Meredith served as a kind of literary ideal for the decadent writers of the 1890s, after whom they could model their own artistic identities. For the writers of the 1890s associated with decadence--including Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons, Oscar Wilde, Richard Le Gallienne, John Davidson, and Robert Hichens--Meredith's career reconciled the seemingly irreconcilable demands of high art with the demands of the market. Having struggled since the mid-century as a poet and novelist, Meredith only really achieved fame by the mid 1880s with the publication of his collected works and his successful *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), both of which contributing greatly to his new-found fame (Cate 391). Meredith stood as an example of the disinterested artist whose talent is eventually recognized and who is rewarded with fame and money, and who demonstrated that artistic integrity, fame, and financial rewards were not necessarily irreconcilable. In Meredith, these writers saw a comrade-in-arms against bourgeois taste and morality and they viewed him as a writer of great artistic integrity who had suffered at the hands of "Victorian middle-class blindness and injustice" (Cate 391). Arthur Symons, for example was "fired by Meredith's 'delightful' and 'exhilarating' hatred of philistinism" (Beckson, *Arthur Symons* 26). Similarly, Richard Le Gallienne, commenting on the "philistine criticism of G. M." in a letter to John Lane in December 1889, deplored the new popularity of the novelist among the British public and referred disparagingly to "the British public's long insensitive disregard of Mr. Meredith finding voice and endeavouring to justify itself, graceless and unrepentant" (qtd. in Nelson, *The Early Nineties* 115). Even George Moore, who did not particularly like Meredith, admitted that he was "an artist" and that his "love of art [was] pure and untainted with commercialism" (*Confessions* 155, 156).

Another significant and equally unacknowledged influence on the decadent writers of the 1890s was Robert Louis Stevenson. Though Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* develops a number of *fin de siècle* themes that would be taken up by writers of decadent fiction, he was known primarily as a writer of romance, a genre that was regarded as the antithesis of French realism and decadence. In fact, critics like Andrew Lang who contributed to the romance/realism debates of the 1880s, argued that romance would reinvigorate, indeed re-masculinize, British fiction and viewed it as "an antidote to the feminizing--and thus morbid--effects of the virus of French realism" (Daly 18). But despite the endorsement given to romance by critics such as Lang, romance was also a genre associated with mass-produced fiction of questionable literary merit as a review of Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by James A. Noble written for the *Academy* makes clear: "[Dr Jekyll] is simply a paper-covered shilling story, belonging, so far as external appearance goes, to a class of literature familiarity with which has bred in the minds of most readers a certain measure of contempt" (55). Noble, however, goes on to qualify this statement in a way that reveals the dual nature of Stevenson's status within the literary culture of the 1880s and 1890s: "[I]n spite of the paper cover and the popular price," Noble continues, "Mr. Stevenson's story distances so unmistakably its three-volume and one-volume competitors that its only fitting place is the place of honour" (55). Stevenson was, admittedly, a producer of popular shilling shockers and boy's adventure stories but, as Noble's remarks indicate, Stevenson also transcended the limits of the genres he wrote in. Noble's sentiments were shared by many of those among the literary élite including Edmund Gosse, Arthur Quiller-Couch, Thomas Hardy, and Henry James but also by the young writers associated with decadence. Dowson, Symons, Machen, Davidson, and the young W. B. Yeats were attracted to what Stephen Arata calls Stevenson's "Paterian attention to the intricacies of style" and not so much to his "blood-and-thunder celebrations of male adventure" that critics like Lang believed would help re-invigorate the English novel (47).

In an essay written just after Stevenson's death, Symons commented on Stevenson's strangely fluid positioning within the literary field: "He was a fastidious craftsman, caring, we might almost say, pre-eminently, for style; yet he was popular. He was most widely known as the writer of boys' books of adventure; yet he was the favourite reading of those who care only for the most literary aspects of literature" ("Robert Louis Stevenson" 77). Like Meredith, Stevenson was popular among the general public and among the intellectual literary élite, though each had achieved their respective statuses in a different way. Meredith had not, from the point of view of the decadent writers, compromised his artistic integrity, but his success had come late in life. While many decadents liked to imagine their recognition might also come late in life (or in some cases posthumously), the exigencies of everyday living coupled with a desire for more immediate gratification and the freedom that popular success would give them in terms of future writing projects, made Stevenson, who mediated between the claims of high art and the marketplace, a more realistic role model.

Stevenson appealed to the decadents because, like them, he shunned conventional bourgeois life, enjoying a Bohemian lifestyle outside of England. Also like them, Stevenson was compelled to write for money and was ashamed of it. Like Dowson, who complained of having to write for the "many headed Beast," Stevenson expressed his contempt for the masses he wrote for, complaining to Gosse in 1886 of "the bestiality of the beast whom we feed": "there must be something wrong in me," he wrote, "or I would not be popular" (Dowson, *Letters* 151; Stevenson, *Letters* 5:171). Stevenson who, like the decadents, wanted to be taken seriously as an artist, decried *Jekyll and Hyde* to his friends among the literary élite, referring to it as "an ignoble shillingsworth," a work "rattled off . . . for coins," and "a cure for bankruptcy [which was] at my heels," (qtd. in Frayling 117).

The decadents sympathized with Stevenson's occasional need to pander to the public and admired the fact that he could do it while still producing works of literary merit. In 1889 Dowson expressed his wish to his collaborator Arthur Moore that Stevenson was in England for he regarded him as one who might be able to offer advice on *Dr Ludovicus*, a "trashy novel" that he was collaborating on with Moore (*Letters* 86, 81). Similarly, Machen acknowledged "a vast respect . . . for the fantastic *Arabian Nights* manner of R.L.S., to those curious researches in the byways of London" (*Things Near and Far* 144). In addition, Stevenson figured as "the most underrated English writer living or deceased" in Shiel's list of literary likes and dislikes jotted down in his copy of *Really and Truly: A Book of Literary Confessions* (Morse 436). Stevenson's ability to transcend the limits of the popular genres in which he wrote was an inspiration to writers who aspired to artistry and yet depended on writing for their living and who were faced with social and cultural conditions which were, in many respects, unfavourable to the production of "high" or "avant-garde" art. For the many decadents who imitated Stevenson, Stevenson served as a model for how popular genres might be made the vehicles for the production of works of literary merit and/or to promote the alternative and oppositional cultures ascribed to by the decadents, a subject I will take up in the second part of this dissertation.

III

Paving the Way for Decadence: Publishers and the Mediation of Decadence

Of course, the fact that the decadents were forced to look for role models in the literary field who mediated successfully between the claims of high art and the claims of the marketplace speaks to the conditions that they were subject to in the production of their work. Not being independently wealthy and therefore not in a position to finance their own publications, the decadents were answerable to publishers who were in turn answerable to the public. Publishers, then, were the true mediators of decadence in the sense that they determined what would be published on the basis of their double sense of responsibility, to the public and to commerce on the one hand and to the writer and art on the other. Aesthetics, ethics, and economics registered in various ways not only in the minds of writers but of publishers too and publishers of the period played an important role in shaping the production of decadence within the British context. Decadent writers imagined their work as work that could be both commercially and artistically successful in large part because they wanted it published, and publishers, for the most part, require that their books make a profit or, at any rate, not a loss.

The decadents, as I have argued, were anxious about what they regarded as the commercialization of the literary field in the light of social, economic and technological developments in the mid-Victorian period. These changes which resulted in what Josephine Guy and Ian Small have referred to as the "bubble economy" in publishing, created a more innovative and enterprising publishing industry which the decadents feared would shut them out (66). Generally, the publishing houses that had dominated the fiction market since the mid-century were traditional, conservative and family-run businesses like Bentley's. These firms had a great deal of experience in the production of three volume novels, the primary means by which fiction was circulated until the mid-1890s.[12] These houses continued to have significant influence into the 1880s and 1890s, though a substantial number of new publishing firms arose at this time in response to a reading population that had tripled in the years between 1850 and 1880 and that was continuing to grow (Cross 206). Though some of these new publishing houses modelled themselves after the more established and conservative firms, publishing general works and three-volume novels for which they depended on sales to circulating libraries, many others addressed the changing market.[13] Thus, firms such as Walter Scott (established 1882), Dent (established 1888), and Hutchinson (established 1887) specialized in the publication of cheap reading matter: reprints of novels, reprints of works out of copyright, editions of the classics, series of science and of great prose writing, etc.

Not all of these newly established firms specialized in cheap fiction, however, and, in reality, the "bubble economy" in publishing benefited all writers, not just popular writers. Some firms, for example, recognized that there was a strong potential profit in catering to the rising middle class's desire for cultural capital and also even to the smaller niche market of intellectuals, literary connoisseurs and book collectors. Firms like the Bodley Head (established by Elkin Mathews and John Lane in 1887 and taken over by Lane in 1894) and Heinemann (established 1890) catered to these markets. Both firms, particularly the Bodley Head, were interested in the aesthetics of book production--paper quality, type, page design, and binding--and published attractive books whose external appearance was an important marketing feature. They were also both innovators in the push to break the challenge the power of the circulating libraries on the fiction market which determined that the three-volume novel was the dominant form of published fiction. The Bodley Head never published three volume novels, and though Heinemann did, he was among the first to publish six shilling single-volume fiction (Fritschner 152).

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[12] Throughout the Victorian period and until the mid-1890s the majority of novels were published in three volumes and sold at the inflated price of thirty-one shillings and sixpence. Such a system worked in favour of the circulating libraries because few people were willing to pay such a price for novels. Unlike the public, the libraries received a discount on the purchase of three-volume novels and lent them to subscribers who paid for borrowing privileges. Cheap editions of three-volume novels were eventually published but not until well after demand for the original edition had waned (this could mean anywhere from 1 to 5 years or more). Such a system fostered a book-borrowing rather than book-buying mentality in the public and it was only in the late 1880s and 1890s that attempts to challenge this monopoly began to achieve any degree of success (Keating 25). This system eventually broke down in the mid 1890s. See also Richard Altick for an account of the publishing industry from 1851-1900 (294-317).

[13] Archibald Constable and Company (established 1890) is an example of a firm which adopted a "conservative and traditional publishing philosophy" at a moment when most new publishers were adapting themselves to the changing conditions of the publishing market (Cooney 66). Methuen (established 1889) was also, at least initially, quite conservative, focusing its attention on the production of the popular three-volume novels

Of the two firms, the Bodley Head catered, at least initially during the Mathews/Lane partnership, to a more specialized market, focusing as it did on the publication of belletristic works--poetry, books of critical essays, and critical studies of authors. The break-up of the partnership between Lane and Mathews in 1894, however, resulted in Lane's expansion of the fiction publications that increasingly catered to a broader readership. By 1898 Lane had expanded his business into a "general publishing enterprise, publishing books on gardening, art, biography and travel" (Nelson, "Bodley Head" 42). Heinemann, on the other hand, though cosmopolitan in his own tastes, a taste reflected in his creation of the International Library (a series that consisted of translated European fiction), did not ignore popular fiction. He catered both to a more mainstream middle-class audience through his publication of popular best-selling novels and to a more select middle-class and intellectual audience in his publication of foreign literature, plays by living playwrights, and more general scientific and art books. These firms would become popular with up-and-coming writers eager to establish themselves not only because they published attractive books that represented modern European literary trends, but also because they welcomed new and unknown authors.

The presence and influence of these firms was not, however, immediately noticed by the young writers of the late 1880s and early 1890s. Dowson, who had considerable knowledge of the field of publishers of popular fiction on the basis of his collaboration

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and on enticing established authors by offering payment based on the fairly new royalty system (Griffiths 211-12).

with Moore on shilling shockers, was stumped when it came to venues for what he considered his more serious artistic productions. Writing to his friend Charles Sayle of his novel *Madame de Viole* in October 1888, he expressed his belief that "no one will publish it. . . . it is too *risqué* for the majority and not sufficiently so for Viziteli [sic]. However I do not much care. I am afraid my constitutional inaction is distressingly apparant [sic] even in fiction and three volumes of nothing but analyses where nobody does anything and everybody analyses everybody else will appal the most original publisher. (*New Letters* 4). In a letter to Sayle four months later in February 1889, Dowson again complained about the difficulty of getting his analytical novel published and of the problems faced by an unknown writer in getting read, let alone published: "I am quite sure that if it ever sees the light of print it will have to be some years hence & at my own expense. . . . Do you know of any publishing firm who are moderately likely to *read* a novel submitted to them by an unknown hand?" (*New Letters* 6). At the time Dowson was writing, his pessimism was perfectly founded. Of the publishing firms that would eventually publish Dowson's work, only the Bodley Head had yet come into existence and it was, at this time, a publisher of poetry and belles-lettres. Methuen would be established later in 1889, Heinemann in 1890, and Leonard Smithers in 1894.

As Dowson's experience makes clear, the crop of new publishing firms that appeared in 1889 and 1890 could not have come at a better time from the point of view of the emerging young writer experimenting in new forms of fiction. Within a year of Dowson's complaints about the lack of suitable publishers, two of the four publishers that would publish Dowson and many of his contemporaries came into being. For those whose works tended towards the decadent, the Bodley Head was particularly welcome for, under the influence of Lane, the firm "deliberately went after unknowns and rebels, authors who could not count on any publisher to be interested in their work or who had manuscripts that had already been rejected on the grounds of risqué or unpopular subject matter" (Stetz, "Sex, Lies" 71). And yet these new publishing firms like Heinemann's and the Bodley Head may not have immediately struck new, young writers as the ideal locations for the publication of innovative fiction. Time was needed for the firms' reputations to develop and, in the case of the Bodley Head, fiction publishing would not become an area of specialty until 1893. Machen, for example, did not submit his manuscript of *The Great God Pan* to either Heinemann or to the Bodley Head when he was searching for a publisher in 1891. Similarly, Dowson did not submit manuscripts to Heinemann until 1893 when the firm accepted his and Moore's *Comedy of Masks*. Instead, new writers often turned first to more established tried-and-true firms, Blackwood's in the case of Machen, Bentley's in the case of Dowson and Moore. By 1893 or 1894, however, the newer enterprising firms had come to be regarded as what Bourdieu has called "natural sites" for the publication of modern and pioneering writing by young new writers and their literary advisors (*Field* 95). In 1894, for example, Robert Hichens was advised to submit his topical satire of Wildean aestheticism and decadence to Heinemann by a friend and literary advisor who had heard that Heinemann was publishing short works by unknown writers (Hichens, *Yesterday* 70). On the same principle, George Egerton was advised by T. P. Gill to submit her manuscript for *Keynotes* to either Heinemann or Lane (Egerton 26-27).

While publishers like Heinemann and Lane may have been more progressive and pioneering in their publishing than established firms or firms that catered more aggressively to a mass audience, they were not entirely immune to market forces. Though both Lane and Heinemann were appreciators of belles-lettres and modern European literature each, in their own way, succumbed to the pressures of the literary market. Thus, while Heinemann was no "lover of popular fiction," he "sometimes pandered to his public . . . giv[ing] it . . . a mixture of [what he called] 'bawdry and religion'" (Chalmers Roberts 5; Whyte 43). Notably, he published best-selling authors like Hall Caine, Ouida, Rudyard Kipling, and Flora Annie Steel. Strategically, Heinemann's publication of best-sellers was wise. From the profits these works generated he was able to subsidize highbrow publications which, though less economically profitable, commanded him the cultural capital that would establish his reputation as a publisher of discriminating tastes.

Lane, on the other hand, whose market was somewhat smaller and more select than that of Heinemann, employed more complicated and manipulative strategies in his pandering. Trading on the vogue for limited editions, the Bodley Head's marketing strategy "presented aesthetic value in terms of material rarity" (Guy and Small 144). The value of Bodley Head books lay in the fact that they were not best-sellers, that they were not tainted by commercialism. And yet this very marketing strategy was designed to make best-sellers, albeit not to the level of a Corelli or a Hall Caine. As Stetz points out in her analysis of the Bodley Head, the Bodley Head was a forerunner of modern advertising techniques in that their marketing strategy not only sold books, it also sold a lifestyle and a means of self-identification. The success of the Bodley Head, she argues, lay "in convincing buyers that consumption was the chief, if not the only, way of making a positive public statement about oneself--about one's own values, education, and ideals" ("Sex, Lies" 77).

Even in the 1890s, the speciousness of such a strategy did not go unnoticed as many cynics recognized the calculation and commercial interests which the firm's practices sought to mystify. The decadents associated with the Bodley Head and the *Yellow Book* bore the brunt of the criticism resulting from Lane's brilliant and manipulative marketing strategies by way of the accusations of commercial interestedness levelled at them by critics like Noble and by other writers. Of course, they profited by them also as the critics were quick to point out. A parody of the *Yellow Book* prospectus that appeared in *Granta* in April 1894 joked that the "yellow" in the title of the magazine referred to "the complexion of the poet and . . . the gold which inspires him" ("The Yellow Boot" 271). Likewise, a satirical poem entitled "A Legend of Vigo Street," originally published in the *Realm* in April 1895, accused both Lane and his writers of commercial interests:

> There's a street that men call Vigo,
> Whither scribblers such as I go;
> With a badly written story
> On the grab for gold and glory;
>
> . . .
>
> All these geniuses abounding;
> Over tea and bread and butter
> Many compliments they utter.
>
> "This is pleasure, though its [sic] commerce,"
> Chuckles wicked old Sir Thomas.
> (*Accepted Addresses* 1-4, 38-42)

Another complex strategy employed by Lane in the marketing of his Keynotes series of fiction was the use of negative reviews to advertise his publications. Such reviews spoke not only to the more élite sector of Lane's market, who perceived value in what was rejected by a mainstream press, but also to a more general middle-class audience who were interested in the racy and risqué matter that the negative reviews seemed to promise.

These examples of Lane's commercial strategies tend to undermine his status as a promoter of high art. As Stetz has commented, "[t]he Bodley's commitment to the avant-garde was less a loving embrace than a marriage of convenience" and Lane was primarily interested in what he believed would make a popular success ("Sex, Lies" 73). Lane, however, was a good mediator and for some time seemed able to balance the claims of the literary marketplace with the aims of his stable of artistically idealistic writers. The Keynotes series, a series consisting of nineteen volumes of short stories and fourteen novels, many of which were attacked for their decadence, serves as a good indicator of the way Lane capitalized on popular trends in the publication of more modern and avant-garde writing. Thus, although the series is notable for its promotion of innovation in literary technique and style, its works also reveal an indebtedness to more popular forms of literature.[14] Lane's publication of George Egerton's *Keynotes* (1893) followed close on the heels of and profited from the massively popular success of Sarah Grand's "new woman" novel *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), issued by Heinemann, a book which sold 20,000 copies and went into six editions in its first year in print (Sutherland 258). Lane continued to publish the most controversial of the popular "new woman" novels including Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895). Lane's series also responded to other popular trends. M. P. Shiel's *Prince Zaleski* (1895), for example, a series of detective stories *à la* Sherlock Holmes, filled a gap that had been left when Arthur Conan Doyle killed off his famous detective in the pages of *Strand Magazine* in December 1893; Arthur Machen's *Great God Pan* (1894) and *The Three Imposters* (1895) resembled the more fantastic and highly popular tales of Robert Louis Stevenson (both his *New Arabian Nights* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*) who died in December 1894. Neither was Lane averse to participating in the popular counter-decadent movement which parodied the work of many of the writers on his list. He published George Street's *Autobiography of a Boy* (1894), a book which played off the popular representation of the decadent as pompous young aristocrat, as well as Owen Seaman's *Battle of the Bays* (1896), reprints of Seaman's *Punch* parodies of Bodley Head poets.

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[14] Wendell V. Harris discusses the innovativeness of the Keynotes series in "John Lane's Keynotes Series and the Fiction of the 1890's" 1409-11.

Ultimately both Heinemann and Lane ran commercial publishing houses to a greater or lesser degree and though they established reputations that made them popular with rebellious young writers who despised the middle-class readership, Heinemann and the Bodley Head also colluded with this readership. This collusion often meant treating what writers regarded as art with a view to marketability and profitability. Such a view necessarily dictated limits on the publishing of decadent and other emerging modernist forms of writing. While there may have been an audience of intellectuals and literary types interested in such writing, its numbers may not have been large enough to sustain even a small print run of books for presses such as Heinemann and Lane.

While monetary considerations played a considerable role in determining what even the most pioneering of British publishers would publish in the 1880s and 1890s, moral considerations were also paramount. Though conditions were gradually changing, Mrs. Grundyism exerted a powerful influence over the literary market, determining the subject matter and treatment of issues in fiction. For many writers, readers, publishers, and intellectuals the dominance of Mrs. Grundyism meant that England was well behind other countries in the development of modern fiction. At a time when European fiction was exploring the limits of naturalistic representation, the English novel's reticence seemed hopelessly outdated. As Edmund Gosse remarked in his editor's note to Heinemann's International Library series, "Life is now treated in fiction by every race but our own with singular candour" (qtd. in Whyte 63). While writers were keen to test the limits of the English novel, publishers, even those sympathetic to the new trends in European literature, had to proceed with caution. The many publishers who established themselves in the late 1880s and early 1890s would have been cognisant and taken heed of the fate that befell Henry Vizetelly, the publisher jailed in 1889 for publishing the supposedly obscene works of Zola and other contemporary French authors. Those, like Heinemann and Lane who were publishing their own translations of French and continental writers as well as writers who emulated the modern literary trends emerging in Europe, had to be especially careful. Heinemann was more cautious than Lane as the editor's note to his International Library of translations of European fiction suggests.

Assuaging the potentially ruffled feathers of the morally censorious, Gosse, the editor, promised that the series would be "amusing" and "wholesome," and expunged of anything which might "give offence" (qtd. in Whyte 63). Heinemann also rejected books on the grounds of immorality as he did in the case of Strindberg whom he believed was "the most pernicious and detestable writer that ever lived" (Whyte 43n1). Furthermore, he did not, as Lane did, pursue "the most advanced and modern of the younger men (Whyte 203). In fact, Lane frequently published writers who had been rejected by Heinemann as he did in the case of George Egerton whose *Keynotes* had been refused by his competitor.

Though the Bodley Head under Lane built its reputation upon publishing that which other publishers deemed immoral or controversial, Lane shrewdly gauged the public's limits of acceptability. By 1893 and 1894 when Lane was heavily engaged in the publication of many controversial modern fictional forms including new woman fiction, decadent poetry, and naturalistic and decadent fiction, the climate, though still hostile, was more tolerant of the new developments in fiction than it had been in the late 1880s when Vizetelly was jailed for publishing "obscene" works. In any case, the Bodley Head did not entirely base its list on the controversial new women and decadent writers. As Stetz argues, "[f]or every so-called 'advanced' novel in the firm's lists, there was a fussily conservative work . . . or a bland and neutral one" ("Sex, Lies" 73). As I have suggested above, Lane's commitment to these modern literary trends was wholly conditional and he responded swiftly to moral condemnation at least insofar as it related to his financial survival. Public notoriety was fine so long as it contributed to sales, but not when it threatened to put him out of business as it did when the Wilde scandal broke, causing him to radically restructure his business.

In many respects, then, the conditions of publishing determined the course that decadence would take within the British literary context and Lane's notorious reputation as a savvy marketer contributed to the reputation of the decadents who published with him as money-grubbing writers of trashy fiction. Though Lane's strategies promoted decadence, at the same time they undermined and misrepresented its values by commericalizing it and marketing it for the middle classes. As Stetz argues, "[d]espite the wish of many Bodley Head authors . . . to overturn the social order, [Lane] understood the commercial wisdom of appealing to that order" ("Sex, Lies" 84). That those within Lane's decadent circle were at odds with Lane's values is suggested by the ambivalence with which so many of these writers regarded Lane, the Bodley Head group, and even the label "decadent" as applied to them. Lane's aggressive marketing practices which made the Bodley Head and "decadence" synonymous in the public mind left many writers with a label that they were uncomfortable with. At the same time, however, they were enormously grateful for the opportunities that Lane provided for them at a time when decadents were having difficulty getting their work published elsewhere.

Clearly, as this chapter argues, there was more to the decadent than the idealized image of themselves they tried to project to the world. In looking beyond the self-proclaimed identities of the decadents to the ways in which they were understood by others within the literary field a different image of the decadent emerges. These competing fictions of the decadent--the decadent as proponent of high art and the decadent as producer of fiction for the masses--emerged out of the complex dialectical relationship between the popular and high art in this period. They also emerged out of the battle for cultural authority waged between popular writers and decadents and between decadents and their opponents within the literary élite.

Though both these competing representations of the decadent are fictional to some degree in that they are constructed for particular polemical purposes, the attempt to explicate the relation between them forces us to look at the literary field in a different way, to understand the field as a battleground in which various positions on aesthetics, ethics, and economics function strategically in constructing particular artistic identities. So too, it forces us to see that decadence as high art and decadence as popular are not always strictly oppositional. In ideal terms, the decadent and the popular writer are located at opposite poles of the literary field. In real terms, however, they often meet somewhere in between as writers' interactions in the literary field, their various literary allegiances, influences, and associations, and a variety of other factors influence their positioning within the literary field forcing various kinds of mediations as they struggle to impose the dominant definition of writer and to assert their authority within the field. In the next part of this thesis, I will take up this battle over cultural authority between decadents and their opponents in the literary field as it spills over into the fiction of the period, a fiction remarkable for its interest in the figure of the decadent writer.

Part 2

Competing Fictions of Decadence

Chapter 1

The Birth of the Decadent in Fiction 1884-1889

I turn now from the "fictions" of decadence as they operated in the social and literary field to the fictions of decadence as they appeared in the fiction of the period. Although the literary field is always a site of struggle as writers battle for the power to impose the dominant definition of writer, the literary field of the 1880s and 1890s was particularly divisive. This claim is borne out by the prevalence of the writer in the fiction of the period, a fiction which takes up the kind of controversies and debates around ethics, aesthetics, economics, gender, professionalism, and commercialism that I have described in the previous chapter. Writers of all kinds participated in this phenomenon. Writers figured centrally or as important characters in novels like Marie Corelli's *Wormwood* (1890) and *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895), George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891), Arnold Bennett's *A Man from the North* (1898), George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888), *Mike Fletcher* (1889), and *Vain Fortune* (1891), George Paston's *A Writer of Books* (1898), Leonard Merrick's *Cynthia* (1896), Ernest Dowson's and Arthur Moore's *Adrian Rome* (1899), Richard Le Gallienne's *Book-Bills of Narcissus* (1891) and *Young Lives* (1899), John Davidson's *The North Wall* (1885) (republished as *A Practical Novelist* [1891]), J. M. Barrie's *When a Man's Single* (1888), Vernon Lee's *Miss Brown* (1884), Walter Besant's *All in a Garden Fair* (1883), James Payn's *A Modern Dick Whittington* (1892), Sarah Grand's *Beth Book* (1897), Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage* (1899), Robert Morley's *In Low Relief* (1890) and *Immortal Youth* (1902), Cyril Arthur Edward Ranger Gull's *The Hypocrite* (1898), Henry Murray's *A Man of Genius* (1895), David Christie Murray's *A Rising Star* (1894), and in many more works of the period. The writer was also a popular subject in the burgeoning field of the short story, most notably in Henry James's numerous stories about writers.

Peter Keating attributes the interest in the writer as protagonist to a number of factors: the influence of French novels about writers like Balzac's *Illusions perdues* and Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale*; the "cult of aestheticism" which pitted the artist against society, resulting in a kind of introspective art; the expanding literary market which generated excitement among some writers about the many new opportunities available (79). Margaret Diane Stetz further notes that the resulting commercialization of literature made the writer an object of interest to the public and that this interest was fed through aggressive marketing in interviews, photographs, and biographies ("Life's Half-Profits" 171-75). But, more importantly, the interest in the writer as protagonist attests to the anxiety and sense of crisis caused by the changes in the literary field and the changing conditions of production. Fictions about the writer could be used to embody arguments in the form of narrative, literalizing the complex issues that were being discussed in the literary debates of the period. They could also, in many respects, simplify the complex situation of the literary field. Thus, whereas the position of real writers in the literary field was often contradictory--as in the case of the decadents whose élitist position might be said to be compromised by their journalistic and hack writing--fictions of the writer could obscure the real conditions of production by focusing on idealized representations of the uncompromising artist. Through these fictions writers offered competing models of authorial identity for the benefit of their readership, a readership that was significantly larger than the readership of the literary periodicals which served as the venue for literary debates. Fiction, then, became an important site for the battle over cultural authority as writers used the medium of the novel and short story in a way that involved the book-buying public in the process of legitimization of certain models of artistic identity.

While writers of all kinds figured in this fiction, my focus in this chapter and in the next will be on the "decadent" who was used in specific ways by writers in the struggle to assert a dominant definition of writer among the many competing models. In this chapter, I examine prototypes of the decadent writer in the 1880s fiction of Vernon Lee and George Moore and the critical responses to this fiction and to the decadent type it introduced. In focusing on Lee and Moore, I locate the origins of the decadent in a period in time before the early 1890s when, as R. K. R. Thornton notes, there was an "explosion in the popularity of the word" and decadence became a central topic of debate and discussion with respect to British literature (42). In so doing, I mean to emphasize the construction of the decadent as a dialogic process which takes us from a new but as yet unlabelled type of writer in the fiction of the 1880s to a fully articulated stereotype of the decadent by 1895. I maintain that this prototype was born of the competing discourses about aesthetics, ethics, readership, female authorship, professionalism, and "high and low" culture that were part of the ongoing struggle for cultural authority in the literary field of the 1880s and 1890s. More specifically, I argue that the emergence of decadence must be understood as a response to aestheticism and naturalism, the two controversial literary trends that preceded decadence and were a strong focus of attention in the 1880s.

I

Aestheticism, Naturalism, and the Emergence of Decadence

As I have suggested above, the emergence of decadence must be understood in relation to the controversial literary trends that preceded it: aestheticism and naturalism. From the point of view of those exploring alternative models of artistic identity in the 1880s, both aestheticism and naturalism had failed to provide an effective counter-discourse to the popular fiction that dominated the literary field. Aestheticism had been a subject of intense controversy in the 1860s and 1870s, most notably in the case of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* of 1866, Robert Buchanan's 1871 attack on the "fleshly school of poetry," and Pater's conclusion to the *Renaissance* of 1873. By the 1880s, however, aestheticism had been largely co-opted and commercialized by the middle class and now invoked ridicule rather than shock and outrage. Hostility and disgust at aestheticism's apparently immoral tenets had given way to mockery as naturalism replaced aestheticism as the new pernicious school. Aestheticism was ridiculed mercilessly in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience* (1881), Frank Burnand's *The Colonel* (1881) and in the *Punch* sketches of George Du Maurier. Instead of worrying, as Harry Quilter did in an 1880 article, about the evil influence of an art that "is wandering in mazes of false feeling and morbid affectation" and that has a "spurious devotion to whatever is foreign, eccentric, archaic, or grotesque," these popular satires ridiculed these elements of aestheticism ("The New Renaissance" 400). As such, the languor, ennui, and posing of the aesthetes was characterized as ridiculous rather than dangerous.

Even Oscar Wilde, aestheticism's most high-profile proponent, became convinced, after returning from America where he had been promoting aestheticism, that the movement was passé (Ellmann 201). In 1883, shortly after his return from America, he visited Paris where he met decadents Maurice Rollinat, Jean Lorrain, Paul Verlaine, Edmond Goncourt and others who provided him with new literary influences and ideas:

"To listen to heralds of decadence after heralding a renaissance was invigorating for Wilde" (Ellmann 218). Under these influences, Wilde's more idealistic aestheticism shaded over into the darker aestheticism of decadence and rather than extolling the importance of home decoration and dress, he developed an interest in the artificial, the perverse, and the exotic. In keeping with his new interests, Wilde abandoned his flamboyant aesthetic dress for the more dignified apparel of the dandy. Wilde's conversion to decadence was a sure sign of aestheticism's declining influence.

Just as aestheticism was on the wane, naturalism--which was often referred to as realism in Britain at this time--emerged as a controversial subject, almost as controversial as decadence would become in the 1890s. Though the naturalist fiction of French novelist Emile Zola had been a subject of debate in Britain since the late 1870s, the debate intensified from 1884 onward as a result of the publication of English translations of Zola by Henry Vizetelly. These translations expanded Zola's circulation beyond the confines of the intellectual and well-educated to the larger British public. As a result, moral issues about the potentially pernicious influence of such literature on an audience of women, young ladies, and the less well-educated reading public intensified the controversy over naturalism. The main concern about naturalism was that, though it professed to give a true and objective view of life, it gave an unbalanced view, focussing with unnecessary attention on the sordid and mean. This concern was echoed, for example, in Rider Haggard's essay "About Fiction": "Whatever there is brutal in humanity--and God knows that there is plenty--whatever there is that is carnal and filthy, is here brought into prominence, and thrust before the reader's eyes. But what becomes of the things that are pure and high--of the great aspirations and the lofty hopes and longings, which *do*, after all, play their part in our human economy and which it is surely the duty of the writer to call attention to and nourish according to his gifts" (176). Though Haggard was a writer of popular fiction, his sentiment was not confined to those in this particular realm of the literary field. Prominent critics like George Saintsbury and Andrew Lang concurred with Haggard.[1] These critics also regarded naturalism not as art, but as fiction designed to have a mass appeal, a criticism that I have suggested in the previous chapter was also launched against decadence. Andrew Lang, for example, was cynical about Zola's scientific-based definition of art and the artist, insisting that "M. Zola and his peers like to write on scandalous topics, because scandal brings notoriety and money" ("Emile Zola" 445).

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[1] Among the more prominent discussions of Zola and naturalism in this period were: Andrew Lang's "Realism and Romance" and "Emile Zola," George Saintsbury's "The Present State of the Novel" Emily Crawford's "Emile Zola," W. S. Lilly's "The New

Even those among the more avant-garde portions of the literary élite were dissatisfied with naturalism even though, in its exposure of middle-class hypocrisy and vice, it clearly raised the hackles of their opponents within and without the literary field and was therefore unlikely to be co-opted by the popular media. But where other critics deplored naturalism on moral grounds, the more advanced set of the literary élite deplored it on aesthetic grounds. Wilde, for example, spoke of Zola disparagingly in these terms in "The Decay of Lying":

> his work is entirely wrong from beginning to end, and wrong not on the grounds of morals, but on the ground of art. From any ethical standpoint it is just what it should be. The author is perfectly truthful and describes things exactly as they happen. What more can any moralist desire? We have no sympathy with the moral indignation of our time against M. Zola. . . . But from the standpoint of art, what can be said in favour of the author of *L'Assommoir*, *Nana*, and *Pot-Bouille*? Nothing. . . . [M. Zola's characters] have their dreary vices and their drearier virtues. The record of their lives is absolutely without interest. Who cares what happens to them? In literature we require distinction, charm, beauty and imaginative power. We don't want to be harrowed and disgusted with an account of the doings of the lower orders. (*Complete Works* 974)

George Moore, a one-time proponent of Zola, who had believed that "if the realists should catch favour in England the English tongue may be saved from dissolution," came to share Wilde's opinion (*Confessions* 173). Ultimately, for Moore, Zola's naturalism was a failure in aesthetic terms: "What I reproach Zola with is that he has no style; there is nothing you won't find in Zola from Chateubriand to the reporting in the *Figaro*

Naturalism," William F. Barry's "Realism and Decadence in French Fiction," Vernon Lee's "The Moral Teachings of Zola." The National Vigilance Association also circulated a pamphlet in 1889 entitled *Pernicious Literature. Debate in the House of Commons. Trial and Conviction for Sale of Zola's Novels. With Opinions of the Press.* The efforts of the National Vigilance Society were successful in bringing publisher Henry Vizetelly to trial on two occasions. On the second occasion, Vizetelly was jailed for publishing the works of Zola and other pernicious French writers.

(*Confessions* 110). Moore's fiction of the 1880s was largely an attempt to improve on Zola's method--a method he in many respects admired--by experimenting with the stylistic methods of writers like Walter Pater and J.-K. Huysmans in an effort to arrive at an aestheticized naturalism, the kind of writing that would eventually come to be labelled decadent.

It was not only proponents of the emerging literary decadent type like Moore who contributed to the construction of ideas about the decadent, however. Popular writers, critics, and opponents of decadence among the literary élite also helped to characterize the emerging decadent. In effect, they countered the counter-discourse by responding with antipathy and sometimes ridicule to the "decadent" type. Their task was made easier by the fact that the critiques of naturalism and aestheticism that were already well established provided effective discursive models to attack a writer who embodied aspects of the naturalist and the aesthete. For these writers and critics too, then, the type that would come to be labelled decadent embodied the worst elements of the aesthete and the naturalist writer. Thus, in Robert Buchanan's critique of modern writers including Moore, the "modern young men" he attacks are characterized by the effeminacy of the aesthetes who "hang about the petticoats of young women" and the cynicism and morbidity of the naturalists who have "a diabolic love of the Horrible" (362, 367).

II

The Decadent Aesthete, Aestheticized Naturalism, and Vernon Lee's *Miss Brown*

One of the first acknowledgements of the emerging decadent type is found in Vernon Lee's 1884 novel *Miss Brown*. As the cultural production of a female writer holding a certain position within the literary field, the novel participates in the literary battle for cultural authority in the 1880s. Lee, born Violet Paget (1856-1935) in France near Boulogne, occupied a position among the literary and artistic intellectuals and aesthetes of the 1880s. When she first came to London in 1881, she counted among her friends Henry James, Walter Pater, Eliza Lynn Linton, Richard Garnett, John Sargent, William Sharp, Oscar Wilde, William Morris and other prominent members of the literary and artistic élite of the period.[2] Sensitive to the prejudice against women writers in the literary field at this time, Lee adopted her male pseudonym at the age of twenty-one because, as she wrote to her friend Mrs. Henrietta Jenkin, "I am sure no one reads a woman's writing on art, history, or aesthetics with anything but mitigated [sic] contempt" (qtd. in Mannocchi 231).[3] Male pseudonym in place, Lee successfully navigated within a predominantly male sector of the literary field of the 1880s as something of a female Walter Pater, publishing critical studies on aesthetics, essays on medieval and Renaissance culture, historical sketches, and a historical novel.

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[2] See Peter Gunn's *Vernon Lee* for an account of Lee's first visits to London (76-89).

In the context of these other literary productions, Lee's *Miss Brown*, a topical three volume novel that satirized the aesthetic movement, was clearly a departure from Lee's more highbrow productions. As a woman writer successfully placed within the literary élite, it is curious that Lee decided to take up novel-writing, especially of the popular three-volume type. Indeed, in 1881, Lee had balked at Longman's suggestion that she write a novel, replying: "Think if I were a novelist! But even had I time, I should shrink from writing what would certainly be vastly inferior to my other work" (qtd. in Gunn 98). Whether her dismissal at this time was due to an élitist disdain for the genre or to her feelings about her own abilities in this genre is unclear, but certainly by the time she came to write *Miss Brown* her feelings had changed. Whereas her earlier work had been concerned with aesthetics and historical subject matter, from this period on, Lee took an increasing interest in contemporary literary issues, engaging in critical discussions about Emile Zola, naturalism, and the modern French and English novel.

Perhaps more surprising than Lee's foray into novel-writing was her choice of subject matter. In writing a satirical *roman à clef* about the literary and artistic circle in which she circulated Lee was, in effect, biting the hand that fed her. She later admitted that the novel had "damaged her reputation for years" (Gunn 109). In addition, Lee's virulent critique of aestheticism as a corrupt school, though prescient in its anticipation of decadence, is, in other respects, dated. One reviewer of the novel from the periodical *Time*, for example, wondered "whether so much talent is not wasted in assailing a worn-out creed" (212). While it is true that Lee's novel is an attack on aestheticism, a movement that was indeed waning by 1884, what the reviewer does not note is the extent to which the novel also represents a critique of the newer creed of naturalism. *Miss Brown* is a representation of the ways in which the interests of naturalism and aestheticism were coalescing in the period, resulting in the darker brand of aestheticism that would become decadence.

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[3] Lee retained her male name both personally and professionally for the remainder of her life even after she became known as a female writer. In personal correspondence, she used both her real name and her pseudonym with no apparent pattern.

The novel is an attempt to offer a corrective to the French naturalist method, a method that, in some respects, Lee admires as an effective counter to the bland English novel. That Lee's intention was to offer a critique of aestheticism through the medium of an improved naturalism is suggested by her essay "A Dialogue on Novels" which she wrote shortly after completing *Miss Brown*. In this article, Baldwin, Lee's mouthpiece, attacks the French realist novel for its "shamelessness" and the English novel for its "timidity" (397). In arguing both for the freedom of the writer to treat any subject matter and for the necessity of the writer to "counterbalance" the "presentation of remarkable evil" with the "presentation of remarkable good," Baldwin defends a fiction that draws on the best elements of the French and the English novel (396). Counterbalancing good with bad in the presentation of evil, *Miss Brown* was an attempt to produce the "wholesome" novel described by Baldwin--a novel that "would maintain our power of taking exception, of protesting, of hating" the vices portrayed in it (396).

Like other writers of the literary élite who took the writer as their subject matter in fiction, Lee may be seen as searching for an alternative model of the artist in response to the failure of aestheticism to account for the role of the artist in the changing social and literary field. Her sense of the problem, however, differed from that of many of her peers within the literary field. While Lee was certainly no Mrs. Grundy, she did deplore the lack of moral and ethical responsibility on the part of many of her peers among the literary élite. Furthermore, as a female member of this élite, Lee resisted the objectification of women which she regarded as an inherent part of the aesthetic and emerging decadent creed. In *Miss Brown*, Lee uses the figure of the decadent writer, Walter Hamlin, to critique both the misogynist elements of the emerging school and its lack of ethical responsibility. She contrasts this decadent aestheticism with the ethical aestheticism of the female protagonist, Anne Brown, an aestheticism that, following naturalism, tells the truth about life but does so, not in a demoralizing manner, but rather in a manner that inspires hope and encourages change. In so doing, Lee undermines the literary and cultural authority of the decadent artist, endorsing instead the legitimacy of the socially engaged and ethically responsible writer. Ultimately, then, Lee endorses what was seen by her many of her male peers among the literary élite as a feminized and middle-class version of aestheticism; in addition, she does so in the very medium that was most associated with a middle-class female readership: the three-volume topical novel.

In her portrayal of Walter Hamlin, the male protagonist of the novel, Lee acknowledges the importance of social factors in fostering the decadent sensibility--the kind of factors I have described in the Part 1, Chapter 1--though she is ultimately unsympathetic to the decadent's rejection of social responsibility. In the novel, Hamlin's exposure to and reliance on bourgeois middle-class society breeds a desire to retreat from the world into an aesthetic utopia: "The world is getting uglier and uglier outside us; we must, out of the materials bequeathed us by our former generations, and with the help of our fancy, build for ourselves a little world within the world, a world of beauty, where we may live with our friends and keep alive whatever small sense of beauty and nobility still remains to us" (1:274). More specifically, Hamlin's decadent misanthropy is a product of his disgust with the commodification of aestheticism by an increasingly affluent middle-class bourgeois London society. Under this class's patronage aestheticism, he feels, has become a "clique-and-shop shoddy aestheticism" (1:7). Hamlin is appalled at the notion of "professional poetry" and "professional art" because it puts artists at the service of the middle class and turns out art as if out of an "aesthetic factory" (1:7, 1:8). He insists on his difference from "professional artists"--"those pen-and-pencil driving men of genius, those reviewer-poets and clerk-poets, those once-a-week-studio-receiving painters" but, like them, he is dependent on his middle-class patrons (1:7-8): "That's the misfortune of London, that a lot of vulgar creatures, merely because they buy our pictures and give dinners, have come and invaded our set, showing us, like so many wild beasts, to the fashionable world" (1:293-94).

Increasingly disdainful of this fashionable middle-class world, Hamlin, like his real-life counterparts, proceeds to distance himself from it. Hamlin's writing of decadent poetry, poetry that Anne describes as "horrible" in "subject and tone," signifies his rebellion against middle class values (2:93). Hamlin defends his poetry with the Wildean decadent quip, "[e]verything is legitimate for the sake of an artistic effect" (2:94). In addition, Hamlin's increasingly decadent lifestyle involving drinking, drug-taking, and sexual licentiousness also signals his break from both the middle class and from the conservative "old-fashioned, long-established aesthetes" who cater to them (3:3). Hamlin's rebellion against the middle-class aesthetic circles is further marked by his relationship with Madame Elaguine, his aristocratic cousin. Through her, Hamlin begins to associate with the "more mystical and Bohemian" decadent set (3:3). They meet in Madame Elaguine's Kensington home which is decorated in a far more exotic manner than the homes of the middle-class aesthetic circle: "the house [was] patched up with old lodging-house furniture and all manner of Eastern stuffs and brocades, crowded with a woman's nick-nacks, strewn with French novels and poems, and redolent of cigarettes and Russian perfumes" (3:4-5). Hamlin's deliberately immoral poetry and his decadent, bohemian, and aristocratic lifestyle serve for him as markers of distinction that legitimate his cultural authority as an artist in ways that anticipate similar modes of legitimization adopted by the decadent writers of the 1890s.

If Lee is prescient about the emergence of decadence from aestheticism, she also anticipates the main objections of later women writers like Sarah Grand and Marie Corelli, whose counter-decadent works I will discuss in the next chapter, as well as those of writers like George Egerton and Ada Leverson, whose relationship to decadence was complicated by their close involvement with the decadent male literary élite. Lee, along with some of these later female writers, was attracted to the tenets of aestheticism even as she tried to correct its more problematic aspects.[4] For many of these women writers, the most serious failing of aestheticism and decadence lay not so much in the often nasty subject matter explored, but rather in the priority given to form over matter and in the separation of the aesthetic from the social. In *Miss Brown*, for example, Lee exposes the blindness of the aesthete and the decadent to the commodifying nature of their own aesthetic, particularly in relation to women--even as they lament the commodification of their art by the middle class. Thus, Hamlin gazes upon Anne acquisitively when he first meets her in what amounts to "a form of masculine connoisseurship dependent on silent and passive female spectacles" (Stetz, "Debating Aestheticism" 31). Hamlin sees only the surface of Anne Brown. In fact, that is all he wants to see, fearing that anything else might interfere with his aesthetic reverie. In a description akin to Pater's account of the Mona Lisa or of a pre-Raphaelite "stunner," Hamlin objectifies Anne as "a beautiful and sombre idol of the heathen," as "the head of Antinous, "as a "strange type, neither Latin nor Greek, but with something of Jewish and something of Ethiopian," and as one of the "mournful and sullen heads of Michaelangelo" (1:24, 1:25).

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[4] Two recent works have contributed significantly to the scholarship on women and aestheticism. The first, *Women and British Aestheticism*, is a collection of essays edited by Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades that sets out to demonstrate the important way in which women writers engaged in aestheticism which has traditionally been regarded as a male domain. Margaret Debelius's contribution to this collection focuses on Leverson's ambivalent view of aestheticism and decadence as revealed through her parodies: "It is precisely through parody that Leverson defined herself as a writer sympathetic to aspects of aestheticism while still critiquing its masculinist Politics" (193). Annette Federico's essay in this volume, "Marie Corelli: Aestheticism in Suburbia" (see also Chapter 2 of her book *Idol of Suburbia*), focuses on Corelli's engagement with decadence and aestheticism. The second work, Talia Schaffer's *The Forgotten Female*

In critiquing Hamlin's act of masculine connoisseurship, Lee's narrative continually juxtaposes these moments of fantasy and objectification with reality. In this instance, Hamlin is brought down from his exotic reveries, by Anne's declaration that she is English (1:26).[5] This detail, like a knowledge of Anne's "intellectual" or "moral" qualities, "spoil[s] the effect" for Hamlin (1:50-51). Ultimately, Hamlin decides to invest in Anne, a decision that the narrator explicitly equates with the commodification of Anne: "He had determined on educating, wooing, and marrying a woman like what Anne Brown seemed to be, as a man might determine to buy a house in a particular fishing or hunting district" (1:122-23). In his objectification of Anne, Hamlin misses something far more valuable than her beautiful form--he is missing her rich inner life, what the narrator

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Aesthetes also seeks to redress the neglect of women writers from histories of aestheticism and constructs what she describes as "an alternative aestheticism" that accounts for the ways in which women altered aestheticism to speak to their own concerns and issues (4). She takes up writers like Ouida, Lucas Malet, and Alice Meynell in her study. In other venues, Sarah Grand's engagement with decadence has been taken up by Teresa Mangum. See Mangum's book on Grand *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant* and her essay "Style Wars of the 1890s: The New Woman and the Decadent."

[5] Though she is actually half Italian and half Scottish, her declaration that she is English has the effect of more effectively exploding Hamlin's absurd reverie.

calls her "life-poem" (1:218). In juxtaposing Hamlin's superficial "masculine connoisseurship" of Anne's physical beauty with the narrator's identification of the beauty of Anne's inner "life-poem," Lee participates in a feminist aesthetic project in which women writers attempted "to rescue the worship of beauty . . . from its association with the exploitation of women as nothing more than beautiful 'occasions' for masculine discovery, theorizing, and reverie" (Stetz, "Debating Aestheticism" 31).

In another critique of Hamlin's decadent aestheticism, the novel yet again uses "the real" to interfere with the aesthete's reverie and to provide contrasting ideas of the beautiful. This time the critique is not so much feminist as it is social and humanist. When Anne tells him about the cramped and close quarters that Hamlin's tenants at Cold Fremley live in and the degradation and sin that such conditions lead them to, Hamlin, in typically decadent fashion, sees the situation as one fascinating for the subject of a "beautiful" poem. Anne's suggestion that Hamlin might beautify the tenants' lives by setting up a factory that would give them work and "ideas of decent living" horrifies him with its practical realism (2:205). In Hamlin's mind, such a factory would destroy the aesthetic beauty of the place "befoul[ing] all that pure and exquisite country with smoke and machine refuse" (2:205). Anne's aestheticism, the feminist and socialist aestheticism endorsed by the novel, insists on the connection between the aesthetic, the beautiful and the social. In this respect, Anne's aestheticism aligns her with the "missionary aesthetes" of the Kyrle Society, a society influenced by the ideals of William Morris. Anne does believe that aestheticism is not incompatible with what she calls the "generosity of aspiration" (3:59). Men such as Morris and Ruskin, she insists, have shown the humanitarian impulse behind aestheticism (3:59).

In representing the rift in the aesthetic school between a humanitarian aestheticism and a degenerate aestheticism, Lee, as I have said, anticipates the emergence of decadence. Though neither Lee nor others within the literary field had yet described this manifestation of aestheticism as "decadent," it was generally recognized by critics of a certain school that aestheticism was being transformed by new and degenerate influences. In their criticisms of this emerging school, they employ the same kind of discourse that was being lodged against naturalism at this time. Thus, in Quilter's 1880 article on "what he called "the gospel of intensity" he describes the new aestheticism as the dead carcase" [sic] of the "pure," "original" and "healthy" Pre-Raphaelitism and also as a "morbid and sickly" school, terms that would eventually come to dominate the discourse against decadence in the 1890s ("New Renaissance" 392, 393). Similarly, reviews of *Miss Brown* in *Time* and the *Academy* acknowledge the distinction between the old and the new aestheticism. Cosmo Monkhouse, the reviewer for the *Academy*, for example, contrasts those "followers of a certain school who have deemed it glory to indulge in nasty dreams, and to be credited with thoughts and actions of which they should be ashamed" with those for whom "the art and poetry of the same school has been food instead of poison" (Monkhouse 6). Though at this point, both types of artist are considered part of the aesthetic school, clearly it is the intention of Quilter and Monkhouse to distinguish between what they perceive as the artistically and culturally legitimate aesthete and the spurious, illegitimate one in the battle over cultural authority. Similarly, in valorizing Anne's feminized middle-class missionary aestheticism over Hamlin's increasingly anti-social and immoral decadent aestheticism, Lee grants cultural and literary legitimacy to those of the aesthetic school who bring the aesthetic and the moral into meaningful relation.[6]

The reception of *Miss Brown* by critics and friends reveals the cost Lee paid in terms of her own struggle for cultural legitimacy in her critique of a decadent aestheticism. While few of her critics and friends doubted the existence of the decadent type of aesthete she described, most were offended by the medium and the manner in which she engaged in her critique. For those who knew Lee's highbrow work, *Miss Brown* represented a serious case of literary slumming, undermining Lee's claims to cultural authority. Henry James, for example, had most likely anticipated something along the lines of his own critique of aestheticism--his portrayal of Gilbert Osmond in *Portrait of a Lady* (1881). He had thought, as he wrote to friend T. S. Perry, that Lee's book--which was dedicated to him--would be "very radical and aesthetic," but he was disappointed to find it "very bad, *strangely* inferior to her other writing" and "without form as art" (qtd. in Gunn 103, 104). And whereas her other writings put her on a par with Walter Pater among the literary élite, *Miss Brown* brought her down to the level of the popular female novelist: "Whatever made you write about such beastly people," Monkhouse asked her in a letter, "do you want to rival Ouida?" (qtd. in Gunn 102). George Moore even wanted to include excerpts from the novel in "Literature at Nurse," his attack on circulating libraries and the deplorable fiction they endorsed (Gunn 102). For Moore, Lee's novel ranked with this kind of lowbrow fiction so popular among the young middle-class female readership.

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[6] Ironically, even while the novel clearly endorses Anne's aestheticism, the resolution of the novel is not particularly hopeful about its triumph. In deciding to marry Hamlin in order to save him from the corrupting influence of Madame Elaguine, Anne has attended to her moral conscience, an act in keeping with her social missionary zeal, but it is clear, even to her, that the marriage will not have an ennobling effect on Hamlin. In aesthetic terms, she bears little hope of making anything more than a superficially beautiful life with him. In this sense, then, Anne's aestheticism proves its own downfall as her missionary zeal to save Hamlin promises her an empty life with a corrupt man. Thus, even as the novel endorses Anne's missionary aestheticism, ultimately it is the decadent Hamlin who emerges triumphant.

For these critics and for others among the literary élite, Lee's work failed as art because it betrayed the high artistic principles that would accord it status as a highbrow literary masterpiece. To James, Lee had been over-zealous in her attack on aestheticism. Being "without delicacy or fineness," the novel was, as James told Perry, ineffective as a satire in James's opinion (qtd. in Gunn 104). Similarly, it failed, in James's opinion, as a realist novel because, as he wrote Lee, "*life* is less criminal, less obnoxious, less objectionable, less crude, more *bon enfant*, more mixed and casual, and even in its most offensive manifestations, more *pardonable*, than the unholy circle with which you have surrounded your heroine" (James 86). In addition, Lee's other artistic sins by the standards of the literary élite included her over-emphasis on morality and her failure to live up to the high standards regarding literary form that the élite prescribed. James enumerated these failings in a letter to Lee which contained a detailed criticism of the novel. Lee had "appealed" James complained,

> too much to . . . the intelligence, the moral sense and experience of the reader; and too little to 2 or 3 others--the plastic, visual, formal--perhaps you have been too much in a moral passion. That has put certain exaggerations, overstatements, *grossissements*, insistences wanting in tact, into your head. Cool first--write afterwards. Morality is hot--but art is icy. . . . Write another novel. . . . Be, in it, more piously plastic, more devoted to *composition*--and less moral. (James 86)

James's discomfort with the "moral passion" of the novel, his insistence on the "iciness" of art, and his interest in the formal or "plastic" elements of art over the "moral" mark him as an exemplary subject within the realm of the literary élite. By contrast, Ouida, the popular novelist with whom Lee had been compared by Cosmo Monkhouse, loved *Miss Brown* and wrote glowingly of it to Bella Duffy, friend of both Ouida and Lee.[7] Unlike James, she found the book realistic: "I think the character of the hero quite possible. . . . The *Athenaeum* seems to live in such a circle of common-place goody-goodies that every character such as one meets in the big world seems impossible" (qtd. in Gunn 103). And though "the book [gave her] the impression of having been written at a galop [sic]," she believed that "this [was] better than weeding and pruning till all flavour is gone" (qtd. in Gunn 103).

The discrepancy between the views of Ouida and James over realism and form shows not only how ideas about literary value differed depending on one's status as popular or élite writer, but also how gender figured in this determination. James's charge that Lee's writing was too "hot" and "morally passionate," resembles charges frequently made against women writers in this period as part of an attempt to exclude women's writing from the domain of high art. Such characteristics were figured as signs of an uneducated and undisciplined nature as male writers tried to reclaim the novel from its perceived domination by women writers and readers. By insisting on the priority of formal elements and the inappropriateness of moral concerns, male writers denied cultural legitimacy to women writers, many of whom were less educated than men, had less formal training, and were more interested in the novel as a vehicle for social and moral edification.

For James, the most significant aspect of Lee's failure to create a truly artistic work lay in her moralistic stance. From the point of view of the literary élite, Lee's over-zealous "moral passion" marked her novel as fodder for the circulating library. The conflicting views of James and Lee over the place of morality and didacticism in art dominated the literary debates of the 1880s and 1890s and formed one of the central oppositions in the competing claims for literary and cultural authority for the writer. In this debate, the endorsers of the moral and ethical responsibilities of fiction tended to occupy positions within the realm of producers of popular art, whereas those who advocated art-for-art's sake principles were generally found among the literary élite. Lee's advocacy of moral and ethical literature is complicated however. She cannot so easily be accused of the kind of Mrs. Grundyism that purists like James associated with writers who believed that fiction ought to have a conscious moral purpose. Lee's ideas about the place of morality in fiction, as I have suggested at the beginning of my discussion of the novel, mediated between the two extreme positions in an attempt to "counterbalance" the "presentation of remarkable evil" with the "presentation of remarkable good" (Lee, "Dialogue" 396). This description certainly applies to *Miss Brown*, a novel that contrasts Hamlin's "remarkable evil" with Anne's "remarkable good."

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[7] Though Ouida had a certain popularity among the literary élite (even James admitted to admiring her "artistry"), ultimately she "wrote for a circulating audience" (Schaffer, *Forgotten Female Aesthetes* 156). Her views on Lee's novel, I argue, firmly mark her position in the realm of popular writers.

Written in the months after the scathing reception of her novel, Lee's "A Dialogue on Novels" is no doubt a reflection on her experience in trying to write a novel that mediated between what Lee regarded as the characteristic qualities of the French and English novel. In his fear that such a production "would be laughed at as stuff for schoolgirls by my French and Italian friends, and howled down as unfit for family-reading by my own country people, Baldwin, Lee's mouthpiece in the essay, describes precisely what Lee had experienced in the reception of her novel. James's disdain for Lee's "moral passion" was equivalent to the reactions of Baldwin's Italian and French friends, while the reaction of other critics and friends echoed the moral outrage of Baldwin's English readers. What James saw as an overly moralistic novel, others saw as an immoral novel. And where Lee was attempting to encourage her readers to deplore Hamlin's decadence in a "wholesome" but realistic treatment of vice ("Dialogue" 396), critics saw a decadent novel. Monkhouse, in a letter to Lee, called the novel "nasty," while the reviewer for the *Spectator* described it as "repulsive" (1670). Achieving the balance between representing vice and writing with a moral intention would continue to be a difficult task for writers attempting to extend the purview of British fiction in the 1880s and 1890s. Sometimes, as in the case of Lee, writers genuinely believed in the moral function of literature. In other cases, however, writers compromised, obeying the moral dictates of the British Matron and the circulating libraries in order to get their work in print and to see it circulating, struggling all the while to push the limits of representation in fiction.

III

George Moore and the Ur-Texts of Decadence: *Confessions of a Young Man* and *Mike Fletcher*

One writer in the 1880s who vehemently refused to pander to the British matron and the circulating libraries was George Moore, whose *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888) was highly influential in the development of the decadent type. Both Moore and *Confessions* hold an important place in the cultural history of British decadence, though this fact is often overlooked.[8] Moore, after all, more so than perhaps any of his contemporaries was steeped in the literature of France. He discovered the writers of French decadence and symbolism well before Wilde, who is largely credited with bringing decadence to England. Moore read Théophile Gautier, Charles Baudelaire, Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle, Léon Dierx, Théodore de Banville, François Coppée, Catulle Mendès, Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé, Philippe-Auguste Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Arthur Rimbaud, Gustave Kahn, Joris-Karl Huysmans, and Gustave Flaubert, writers who, whether strictly decadent or no, were perceived as such in England where French literature was, at this time, generally regarded as corrupting and immoral. As Dick notes in her introduction to *Confessions*, Moore was particularly attracted to the decadent aspects of nineteenth-century French literature--"the paganism and aestheticism of Gautier, the decadence and cynicism of Baudelaire, the elitism of the symbolists, the precision and concreteness of Parnassian verse, and the uninhibited subject matter enjoyed by the Impressionists and naturalists" (4). In addition, Moore published *Flowers of Passion* (1878) and *Pagan Poems* (1881)--two volumes of decadent poetry--and was one of the first to introduce the subject of French decadence to the English reading public in an article in the *Court and Society Review* in 1887. In this article, he uses the term narrowly and with precision, referring specifically to the young disciples of Mallarmé who, specializing in the poem in prose, represent "the *contre coup* of Zola and his school" (58).[9]

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[8] Moore himself is partly responsible for his erasure from the cultural history of decadence. He disavowed his experimental decadent novels *A Mere Accident* and *Mike Fletcher* which were not included in his *Collected Works* (Jeffares 21).

In addition, Moore had a significant influence on the younger generation of decadents and other writers of the 1890s. *Confessions* in particular had a profound impact on these writers both for its representation of the values and ideals of the decadent type and as "an index to many of the major artistic movements in France and England in the late nineteenth century" (Dick 2). Indeed, Glesson White of the *Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, a magazine which devoted a substantial amount of coverage to promoting decadence, said of Moore's novel that "if there was ever a volume worthy of study by an artist it is this" (349). And clearly, many artists of the younger generation studied it. Arthur Symons, recalling his reading of Moore's works of the 1880s--including *Mike Fletcher*, *Confessions of a Young Man*, and *A Mere Accident*--described them as "entertaining, realistic, and decadent; and certainly founded on modern French fiction" (*Memoirs* 56). Richard Le Gallienne also recalled his "youthful enthusiasm" for Moore in *The Romantic '90s* (10). And, Robert Hichens, despite his humorous attack on Moore in *The Green Carnation*, thought Moore to be "one of the greatest writers of the time" (*Yesterday* 75). Likewise, Machen, albeit in the more qualified manner that characterized his later years, expressed his admiration for Moore in a letter to Paul England in 1931 in which he praised Moore's "beautiful and delicate English" and declared what he called Moore's "second-rate Zola [his works of the 1880s and 1890s] . . . quite good in its way" (*Selected Letters* 228). Symons, Le Gallienne, and Machen were precisely the kind of young men being hailed by Dayne in the closing pages of *Confessions*, a section which, despite the satiric tone of much of the novel, is sincere in its appeal to young men to "be young as I was" and to "love youth as I did" (191).

Moore had had his share of difficulties in the 1880s in terms of his literary career, not so much in getting his work published but rather in getting it circulated. The subject matter of Moore's early novels along with his association with the notorious Henry Vizetelly, the publisher whose Zola publications were the subject of such controversy, rendered him unfit for circulation according to the libraries who had banned two of his pre-*Confessions* novels. When it came time to publish *Confessions*, Moore turned to Swan Sonnenschein in an effort to "escape the total censorship of the circulating libraries" (Frazier 154). Sonneschein was a respectable highbrow firm that nonetheless published works by progressive writers like Karl Marx, George Bernard Shaw, and Edward Carpenter and that specialized in scholarly works of philosophy and social science, publishing very little fiction. But while William Swan Sonnenschein was, as Frazier notes, a "man of wide culture, who especially liked to publish works of philosophy and advanced socialism," his partners, Hubert Wigram--a High Churchman--and Walter Sichel--a Tory who would later apply for the post of Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays, the stage censor--were far more conservative and Moore was again subject to a certain amount of censorship by his publisher (154). Though Wigram was able to insist on the censoring of obscenities from *Confessions* and though the conservative Sichel agreed to serialize it in his "family" magazine, *Time*, where it ran from July to November 1887, the novel, when it came out a few months later, still shocked and offended many. Booksellers responded adversely to Moore's name according to Sonnenschein's travellers--"Wouldn't have his book in my establishment, for any consideration"--and Mudie's may well have banned it (Sonnenschein to Moore, 8 February 1888).[10]

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[9] This unsigned article includes translations of two of Mallarmé's poems in prose. The contents of the article appear in a slightly revised form in *Confessions* (169-72).

Moore's representation of the emerging decadent type in *Confessions* contrasts sharply with that of Lee. Whereas Lee's representation functioned as a critique of certain tendencies in the development of aestheticism, Moore's *Confessions* celebrates the emergence of a defiant oppositional culture. Perhaps most significantly, where Lee operates in the low cultural sphere of the three-volume popular novel with its generic conventions, Moore rejects this format. Instead, Moore experiments with form and genre writing a one volume novel that is part *künstlerroman* part confessional novel in an effort to assert his literary and cultural authority. The *künstlerroman* had its origins in the romantic period, a period which saw the valorization of the artist and man of genius. It was well suited, then, to the writers of the intellectual literary élite of the 1880s and 1890s who wanted to assert their cultural authority in the face of a society whose commercial ethos signalled, in the mind of these writers, a disrespect for the arts. Similarly, Moore's adoption of the confessional autobiographical mode also harks back to the Romantic period when this genre was popular, enabling as it did the representation of subjectivity as a means of insisting on the writer's status as an exemplary subject. Like Rousseau's *Confessions*, Moore's novel ultimately serves as a self-vindication and valorizes the writer-protagonist's individualism and rebelliousness. Moore, however, denied the influence of Rousseau, claiming in his 1917 preface that he had no knowledge of Rousseau when writing his *Confessions* (*Confessions* 42). He did, however, acknowledge the influence of Augustine's *Confessions* in his 1889 preface to the second edition of the novel. But rather than offering an account of a "god-tortured soul" as Augustine had done, Moore offered the story of an "art-tortured soul," an act that emphasized the sacred nature of art to the aesthetes and decadents (*Confessions* 35). In a similarly sacrilegious move, Moore "reversed the traditional Christian mode of confession" by "demonstrat[ing] pride rather than contrition for his sins" (Dick 1). In these respects, Moore meant his work to serve as a slap in the face to the conventional morality he associated with middle-class English society.

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[10] Despite the solid reputation of Swan Sonnenschein, Mudie's may well have banned *Confessions*. In a letter to Moore regarding the book, Sonnenschein wrote: "Our dear friend, Mr Mudie, will not buy the book, I hear. He is 'reading' it, which I suppose means that he is considering how he may best decline it without offence to us. Perhaps I am doing him injustice; but nous verrons. . . ." (Sonnenschein to Moore, 8 February 1888).

Based partly on Moore's own experiences in Paris in the 1870s and influenced strongly by Huysman's *A rebours* (1884), the novel traces the development of Edward Dayne (who becomes "George Moore" from the second edition on) from his childhood in Ireland to his artistic apprenticeship in Paris to his beginnings as a literary man in London.[11] In form, the novel is a rather loosely constructed narrative composed of impressions, opinions, passions, enthusiasms, art and literary criticism, poems, and invective social commentary--what Graham Hough calls "a panoramic view of the formation of a taste and an attitude [and] of all the aesthetic and social influences that went to make it" (124). More specifically, this taste and attitude are representative of the values and ideals of the kind of artist that emerged from the rift between the professional intellectuals and the middle class as these artists began to search for alternatives to the aestheticism that had been appropriated by the middle class. Dayne is significantly different, then, from the aesthetes parodied throughout the 1880s by George Du Maurier in *Punch*, caricatures that were based on figures like Wilde and Whistler and that generally represented the aesthete as a society figure à la Whistler or Wilde.[12] Dayne, on the other hand, though he is of upper rather than middle-class origins, abandons this world to become the decadent bohemian artist completely divorced from the London high society that is represented as the aesthete's stomping ground in the *Punch* caricatures.

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[11] I will refer to the protagonist as Dayne rather than Moore simply because I am using the first edition of the novel. Otherwise, I see Dayne as Moore, as did the readers of the novel in the 1880s who knew anything of Moore's life. When he changed the protagonist's name to Moore for the second edition, Moore acknowledged that his use of a fictitious name had been "a failure of courage which, I must admit, partly spoils the truth of the book" (qtd. in Frazier 165).

In his views, Dayne covers the full spectrum of the controversial attitudes held by the decadents who rebelled against the middle class in the social sphere and against popular writers in the literary field. He decries Universal Education, the mediocrity of the new reading public, the detrimental effect of women readers on the state of English literature, the commercialization of literature, and the capitulation of British writers to this market and to the tastes of bourgeois readers. He discredits modern-day journalism and valorizes the kinds of art and literature that were regarded in England as noxious and corrupting. In addition, Dayne has an "appetite for the strange, abnormal and unhealthy in art" (87); he displays exotic and outré tastes in furnishing and interior decoration; he idealizes as "high priest" the poor unappreciated artist, Cabaner, whose disinterestedness and sheer devotion to art serve as a "holy example" to "save us all from all base commercialism, from all hateful prostitution" (108); he despises the kind of popular literature read by the middle classes and endorsed by the circulating libraries (143-45); he declares that Art is the direct antithesis to democracy" and extols the "snob" as "the ark that floats triumphant over the democratic wave" (112, 140); he rails against middle-class Respectability and adopts the deliberately provocative stance of the decadent artist as he addresses the hypocritical reader (138-141; 179-90); to his other audience, his audience of young, male readers, Dayne proposes an alternative form of Education, a Paterian ideal of self-culture, urging these sympathetic readers to educate themselves (192). Dayne's views, then, are akin to those of the real artists I have discussed in the preceding chapter and are central to understanding the origins of the decadent type, a type that was crystallized in the 1890s in the press and in fiction by other writers.

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[12] For a description of the development of *Punch*'s caricatures of the aesthetes and decadents see Gary Schmidgall's *The Stranger Wilde* (43-63) and Chapter 4 of Dennis Denisoff's *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody, 1840-1940.*

But Dayne is unlike these writers insofar as he is an idealized fictional reflection of them who does not have to deal with the economic realities of the literary market: "Fortunately," he tells the reader, "it was not incumbent upon me to live by my pen" (*Confessions* 150). Dayne's "audacity" and "indifference to material profit" are, in Bourdieu's terms, directly related to his possession of economic capital. Dayne can afford to take risks in his production of literature, risks which often ultimately accrue the risk-taker with a significant amount of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, *Rules* 262). Whereas in the case of his real-life counterparts, at least those without such substantial economic capital, hackwork and journalism often meant writers were catering to the very audience they claimed to despise and involved them in the commercial aspects of the literary field, Dayne is able to remain true to his ideals. In reality, Moore, despite his control of his family's estate, was in a similar financial position to his peers and relied a great deal on the sales of his works in the 1880s. As Dick notes, in order to emphasize "the purity of his interest in literature" Moore "overstates his financial independence" (Moore, *Confessions* 251n2). Such fictional constructions of the audacious, risk-taking writer helped to perpetuate the image of the defiant artist unanswerable to the bourgeois middle-class culture by concealing the economic realities that made decadent writers more dependent on this class than they cared to admit. Fictional representations of the writer of this type were instrumental in establishing the cultural superiority of the artist figure vis-à-vis the middle class and of the literary superiority of this kind of writer over others who either cater to the middle class or who are inferior artists.

Despite the novel's importance in establishing a prototype for fictional representations of the decadent, critics have tended to gloss over its relation to decadence. Instead, they tend to focus on its relation to Moore's more mature work or on its relation to the modern autobiographical artist's novel, particularly James Joyce's *Portrait of the*

Artist as a Young Man.[13] Attention is given to how Moore used the novel as vehicle to write and re-write himself through the many altered versions and many prefaces he wrote throughout his life. By contrast, relatively little attention is paid to the effect and influence of Moore's work in its immediate social context. Richard Cave entirely disavows the novel's relationship to decadence, stating that it is not the "Aesthete's bible" that critics like William Gaunt claim it is (106). Invoking Holbrook Jackson, Cave insists that Moore merely "played at decadence" and that Moore intended his book to be a satire (107).[14] But while it is true that Moore maintains an ironic distance from his protagonist, allowing the reader to see his weaknesses and record his inconsistencies, the novel is hardly an out and out satire of the type that the protagonist presents. The strongest criticisms in the novel are directed not against the protagonist but rather against middle class Victorian society and in these views, the reader is meant to sympathize with Dayne. When Cave declares that Moore is "far removed from shocking us" and that his protagonist may be "pretentious and naughty, perhaps, even at times annoying; but his exaggerations do not disturb us, they move us merely to laughter," he is surely thinking of the effect on a more modern-day reader, a reader well versed in the stereotype of the artist that Moore describes (106-107). But this type would not become stereotypical and conventional until later.[15]

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[13] David Weir is an exception here. He sees *Confessions* as both decadent and as a precursor of modernist literary trends. Like me, Weir sees the book as "a fairly complete record of decadent tastes" and of the "sensibility of a young man living in a period of literary ferment and experimentation" (113). Weir argues that Moore finds an English idiom for the expression of the mood of French decadence in a way that Swinburne and Wilde did not (116). Similarly, earlier critics of decadence recognize the decadent qualities of *Confessions*. Osbert Burdett refers to it as "the first book of the Beardsley period" (79), while Madeleine L. Cazamian declares that *Confessions* is significant in its anticipation of the direction that literature would take over the next fifteen years when the "young man" would become the favourite hero of the nineties. She links *Confessions* with Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, Machen's *Hill of Dreams*, Le Gallienne's *Book-Bills of Narcissus*, Hichens's *Greeen Carnation*, and G. S. Street's *Autobiography of a Boy* (377).

[14] Cave derives this phrase from Holbrook Jackson's *The Eighteen Nineties* in which Jackson characterizes Moore as one "as far removed from the typical decadent as the [decadent] is from the average smoking-room citizen who satisfies an age-long taste for forbidden fruit with a *risqué* story" (63).

The novel, then, problematizes traditional models of satire. If Moore's characterization of Dayne was meant to be a satire of the type of artist he represents, it could not be a very effective one since the type was an emerging type and, for satire to work, the type has to be a widely recognizable one. On the other hand, satire was, in some respects, an important vehicle for decadence within the period. In the context of an earnest and hardworking bourgeois culture, satire, even self-satire can function as a radical counter-discourse, a use of satire that diverges from its status as a conservative genre. If middle-class Victorians stand for earnestness and industry, than the most successful revenge is to characterize oneself as not taking oneself seriously--*especially* in matters where seriousness should be paramount as when Dayne declares that one great work of art is worth the deaths of thousands (*Confessions* 125). Whatever view Moore took of his novel as regards satire, it was not its satire that garnered the most attention in its immediate social and historical context. Few, save for Walter Pater, remarked on the novel's satiric elements and it is important, as Robert Langenfeld argues, to note that Pater called it satiric and not a satire, an important distinction (92). Pater did not see the book primarily as one that censured folly and vice. Rather, as Moore acknowledges in his 1904 preface to the novel, Pater was greatly disturbed by what he termed the "morally questionable shape of the novel" (*Confessions* 42).

Like Pater, reviewers of the novel found other elements more important than its satiric qualities. Most reviews took the novel and Dayne quite seriously. Even as it was being serialized in *Time*, *Confessions* was receiving attention for its innovativeness. *Vanity Fair*, for example, in a September 1887 review of the serial, attributed to Moore the "invent[ion]" of "a new style" which was at once "personal," "attractive," and "provoking" and described the novel as a "brilliant piece of rottenness" (qtd. in Frazier 159). William Sharp, reviewing the novel for the *Academy* in March of the following year, also praised the novel highly for its "cleverness," a term that would increasingly be used to refer pejoratively to decadent fiction (184). The reviewer for another literary magazine, *The Hawk*--a magazine for "youthful, caddish, hyper-male" types which has been described as a "sensational arty gossip sheet whose editors lived precariously between threats of libel action and bankruptcy petitions"--praised the uniqueness of Moore's style (Frazier 165; Malcolm Brown 114). The *Hawk* reviewer claimed that the book contained "the hardest, most audacious, most rigid thinking that our generation has seen" and described Moore as a writer unparalleled in English prose (172). If *Confessions* was regarded as appealing to the manly, caddish readership of the *Hawk*, it also received praise in a journal with a vastly different audience from that of the *Hawk*--*The Artist and Journal of Home Culture* which appealed to artists but also, as Laurel Brake argues, covertly to a gay community of readers who functioned as an "important backup to its dominant address to its 'artist' readers" ("'Gay Discourse'" 272). *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture* extolled the novel, declaring Moore, as representative of "Modern Art," the winner in the battle with the circulating libraries. Its reviewer, Gleeson White, regarded it as a work which "swept away" the "neatly balanced theories and painfully built-up formulas of knowledge" of Victorianism, replacing them with "a new standard of excellence . . . with its rules couched in a tongue strangely unfamiliar" (349).

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[15] Cave is, in fact, basing his comments on the last version of the text. This version, it could be argued is substantially different from the early versions. In *George Moore and the Autogenous Self*, Elizabeth Grubgeld notes that, as time went on, Moore became more critical of his protagonist. This criticism, she claims, revealed itself "through prefaces and revisions added in later years" (107).

White's reference to Moore's expression of ideas in "a tongue strangely unfamiliar" echoes many of the reviewers feelings about the novel and more particularly about Dayne. Dayne seemed to represent a new type of artist with new ideals and values, very unlike the more familiar aesthete. Far from viewing these ideas as satirical, these reviewers found them fresh and exciting. In their descriptions of and reactions to Dayne, the reviewers seem to be searching for words to describe this apparently new type. When it was published as a serial in 1887 and later in book form in February of 1888, the term decadent or decadence had not yet come into common use and was used very specifically (as Moore had used it in his article the year previously) in relation to tendencies in French literature. But it is clear from the reviews and from the ensuing controversy that a descriptive term for this new breed of writer is increasingly necessary and that the term "aesthete" is not quite adequate as a descriptor: it is, in fact, not used at all. The critic for the *Athenaeum* wrote a scathing review in which he referred to Dayne generally as "a disagreeable young man, of bad education and vicious habits, with a passion for literary garbage" (402). William Sharp of the *Academy* attempted a more precise definition, describing Dayne as "a young man of the 'pure Pagan' kind" and as a "'sensualist,' not in its derogatory, but in its actual sense" (184). Sharp's invocation of the term Pagan and his insistence that sensualist be understood in its actual sense recalls Pater's *Renaissance* with its recurring discussion of pagan impulses in the human spirit and its famous hedonistic doctrine of the Conclusion--a book was to have a tremendous influence on Moore certainly, but also on the writers of the 1890s who came to be known as decadents. The reviewer for *Vanity Fair* also came nearer the mark, describing Dayne as "a morbid fellow," employing a term that, at the height of the decadent controversy in the 1890s, would become a synonym for decadence (322).

Already, in the negative reviews of the novel we can see the beginnings of what would come to constitute a counter-discourse to decadence. This counter-discourse was instrumental in undermining the cultural authority of decadent writers and was an integral part of popular and counter-decadent constructions of them. Such constructions endorsed the status quo both socially and in literary terms and attacked the decadent type on these terms. Hence, the *Athenaeum* critic's view that the self-education represented in the novel is simply "bad education" and that the protagonist's supposedly refined literary tastes are, in fact, "garbage." But the most stringent attack on Moore and more particularly on the artist type he represented was launched by Robert Buchanan a year later in 1889. Buchanan's attack on Moore and other writers appeared in the *Universal Review*, a periodical edited by Harry Quilter, who, as I have discussed, had written a diatribe against aestheticism in 1880 and would write a similar diatribe against decadence in 1895.[16]

Buchanan's article, "The Modern Young Man as Critic," appeared just after Moore's novel went into its second edition, the edition in which Moore acknowledged the novel's autobiographical nature by changing the name of his protagonist from Dayne to Moore. In his discussion, Buchanan divides the "modern young man" into a number of categories and identifies a particular writer with each. Thus, Henry James is the "superfine young man," Paul Bourget is the "detrimental young man," Guy de Maupassant is the "olfactory young man," William Archer is the "young man in a cheap literary suit," while Moore is 'the Bank-Holiday Young Man." While Buchanan certainly lumps together a lot of different kinds of writers in this article, the defining features of the decadent are beginning to take shape. What these men have in common, according to Buchanan, is their pessimism, cynicism, and their endorsement of Realism and "*Art pour Art*" (354).

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[16] Ironically, the *Universal Review* was published by Swan Sonnenschein, the publishers of Moore's *Confessions*. Swan Sonneschein had no pecuniary interest in the magazine however.

Buchanan's description of Moore as the "Bank-Holiday Young Man" and his invocation of the Cockney working-class 'Arry to characterize Moore--"the Cockney Bohemian of the Latin Quarter" (371)--may seem a strange association given Moore's real class positioning but it speaks powerfully to the way in which decadence appeared to many at the time to disturb class hierarchies and distinctions.[17] The music hall, a favoured haunt of decadents, also disturbed class boundaries, even though it was becoming a far more mainstream institution in this period. For the decadents, the music hall was a place where the aristocratic and working-class culture they appropriated in their self-fashioning came together. Real aristocrats and wannabe aristocrats mingled in the hall and these wannabes included not only the decadents but also upstarts of the lower middle and working class who aped their betters. As Peter Bailey explains, "[The music hall] was the perfect setting for the aspirant swell, the young clerk from the latchkey class, decked out in all the apparatus of the toff, graduating from the protective cluster of his own kind at the side bar to the public glory of a seat at the singer's table with a personal spitoon" (200). This figure, with whom Moore is being conflated, is that of the "working-class dandy," a "neglected but significant phenomenon" as Bailey argues (200). It is easy to see how this conflation might be made given the decadents' propensity for extravagant dress. Both the decadents and the lower middle- and working-class dandies who paraded themselves about in their finery on bank holidays shared the same interests in the music hall, sporting, drinking, and love-making, interests that Buchanan characterizes as "pipes and beer" and "indecency, horseplay, the jolly Bank Holiday and all its concomitant delights" (371). In associating Moore with such figures, Buchanan attempts to undermine and indeed mocks Moore's idea of self-culture, claiming that Moore has understood nothing of what he has claimed to have read and that his head is a "confused, ill-balanced" one (371).

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[17] There was, of course, a precedent for using the term "Cockney" as a term of abuse in literary critical circles. This term had been applied in the early nineteenth century by proponents of the lake school to describe the London poets--John Keats, Percy Shelley, Leigh Hunt, and William Hazlitt--whose verse they regarded as vulgar and over-emotional, loud, and boisterous. There may be echoes of this kind of criticism in Buchanan's attack though, given the focus on the music hall, I think that Buchanan is attempting a slightly different form of critique.

Though Buchanan's association of Moore with working-class culture would go on to become one of the criticisms launched at decadence in the 1890s, there are other features of his article that invoke the kind of discourses that would become more prominent in the attack on decadence in the 1890s. These discourses were in evidence in a number of attacks against various kinds of literature in the 1880s and 1890s including Zolaism, Ibsenism, and debates about pernicious literature, but they would be most finely honed when the attack on decadence got under way in the 1890s. For example, Buchanan invokes a gendered discourse to critique "the young men": "There is neither flesh and blood, nor virility, nor manly vigour, in these young moderns" (361). Though the charges of unmanliness and effeminacy directed against decadents have often been read as a calling into question of the sexuality of decadents, we must pay close attention to the context and surrounding discourse to fully understand the implication of these charges, an argument that Alan Sinfield makes forcefully in his study of the history of the use of these terms in the nineteenth century. In the case of Buchanan, what is unmanly in Moore is, ironically, what Moore's most recent biographer calls Moore's "hyper-male" style, the "ugly masculinity of the caddish club" which characterizes *Confessions* (Frazier 165, 199). Buchanan's accusation of unmanliness derives from his sense of the "young man's" abandonment of the chivalric role of men, a position he explains in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* in response to an editorial on his article:

> One of my strongest contentions against the Modern Young Man as Critic . . . is that, thanks to him . . . Chivalry is fast becoming forgotten; that the old faith in the purity of womanhood, which once made men heroic, is being fast exchanged for an utter disbelief in all feminine ideals whatsoever. . . . the Pessimist of To-day . . . pollutes the tabernacle of woman's soul. He frankly despises, and persistently depreciates, what

> was once a temple where all *strong* men, all men who were sons, husbands, or fathers, might meet and pray. ("Is Chivalry Still Possible?" 5).

Buchanan's complex sense of unmanliness hinges on a man's relation to a woman. To be unmanly is to fall away from one's traditional chivalric role towards women, to be weak where a strong man, a manly man, would uphold his chivalric duty. It is this sense of unmanliness that Buchanan charges the otherwise "hyper-male" and "caddish" Moore with and not unmanliness with implications of a same-sex desire on the part of Moore.

Buchanan also speaks of the "young man" in terms of some of the emerging popularized medical discourses: they lack "moral health" and in hereditary terms they represent a "gradual process of deterioration" of a literary genealogy that has resulted in "'an exhausted breed'" ("Modern" 362). He even goes so far as to draw an analogy between these writers and Jack the Ripper. They are, he insists, "our 'Jack the Rippers' . . . in literature, in art, and in criticism" in their attachment to the negative creed of pessimism and in their treatment of women, whether literal or literary ("Modern" 368-69). But despite Buchanan's claim that "[f]ortunately for Art, for letters" the modern young man was "fast becoming a public bore, a crying scandal," the type would continue to be exploited in literature and the press for a long time ("Modern" 372). The type of young artist figure that Moore had introduced in 1888 would reappear in many different guises through the 1890s and would become a central theme of modernist literature.

Moore himself returned to the type in *Mike Fletcher* (1889), another depiction of the caddish decadent. This novel not only represents the decadent artist but is also an early example of a British decadent novel. Unsurprisingly, Moore had difficulty getting the novel published. Though Swan Sonnenschein considered it for *Time* and for book publication, it was quickly rejected after the Vizetelly trial, a trial which demonstrated the power that the National Vigilance Association had in preventing what it regarded as obscene works from circulating. At this time Sonnenschein advised Moore, "burn your new MS. If you intend to write for the public in the future, you will never repent it" (qtd. in Frazier 184). Sonnenschein was not so far wrong. Moore would have great difficulty getting a publisher in the few years following *Mike Fletcher*. Eventually Moore did find a publisher for *Mike Fletcher* in the figures of Edmund Downey and Osbert Ward of

Ward and Downey. Though, as Frazier notes, Ward and Downey specialized "mainly in 'Irish humour' and romantic Irish fiction aimed at tourists and expatriates," Downey was always eager to help Irish artists (192).

The novel centres on Fletcher, a writer and journalist who writes for the *Pilgrim*, a magazine that stands for the defiant and anti-bourgeois beliefs and values of the decadent artist. "[C]onsider[ing] as worthless all that the world held in estimation, and . . . laud[ing] as best all that the world had agreed to discard," the *Pilgrim* promoted the genius of obscure Latin writers and Renaissance painters, the divinity of the bar-room and the music-hall, "the genius of courtesans," and "the folly of education" (39, 39-40).[18] Fletcher's decadent literary productions, which demonstrate the influence of Schopenhauer, include a poem about Adam and Eve at the end of the world--in which Adam, refusing to bring forth another race of doomed men into the world, resists the temptations of Eve--and a projected play about John and Jesus including a dance sequence featuring Salomé (46-52, 118). But this novel, unlike *Confessions*, focuses less on the trials and tribulations of the decadent writer in the face of a commercialized literary sphere than it does on the decadent as a doomed modern social type. The novel traces Fletcher's attempts to cure himself of *ennui*, attempts which lead him to engage in numerous vices and, alternately, to engage actively in social work. In the course of the novel, Fletcher womanizes, socializes with a wild and caddish group of aristocrats, retires to the country, takes on social work, gambles, and, Rimbaudlike, runs away to the desert to join a tribe of Bedouins. When all these attempts fail, Fletcher kills himself.

Where *Confessions* was a defiant declaration of the emergence of a new type of writer, this writer was, in a sense, a writer without a characteristic art beyond his own self-valorizing manifesto. *Mike Fletcher*, on the other hand, is an attempt to envisage what kind of novel this new decadent writer might produce. In *Mike Fletcher*, then, Moore uses the figure of the decadent not to voice the beliefs, values, and ideals of a new breed of artist, but rather as the subject matter of a new breed of fiction that he believed would reinvigorate the British novel. Moore's belief that the decadent or "modern young man" novel would be crucial in the development of the modern British novel is attested to by his earlier treatment of the subject in *A Mere Accident* (1887), a novel about a des Esseintes-like young man, John Norton (who also appears in *Mike Fletcher*), who is torn between his sensually aesthetic and his ascetic nature. For Moore, the subject of the decadent young man novels offered a number of possibilities: a chance to expand the purview of fiction in the way of naturalism beyond the confines of standard British novels that he believed catered to British matrons and young ladies; in addition, the artistic sensitivity of the protagonist allowed for the exploitation of aesthetic stylistic effects, an element that Moore found lacking in Zola's naturalism.

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[18] The *Pilgrim* is modelled on the *Hawk*, one of the magazines that praised *Confessions* so highly and that was originally slated to publish the novel in serial form before it got too long and Moore turned to *Time*. The *Hawk* was now owned by Moore's brother, Augustus upon whom the character of Mike Fletcher was partially based.

Mike Fletcher, then, marks Moore's attempts to combine elements of Zolaesque naturalism with the luxurious decadent style of Huysmans and the aestheticism of Pater. At the time of writing the novel, Moore wrote his mother that he thought it "the best thing [he] had ever done" (qtd. in Hone 150). Where *Confessions* was a defiant declaration of his literary and cultural authority, *Mike Fletcher* would, as he believed, prove this claim artistically: "My novel is a new method," he told his mother. "It is not a warming up out of Dickens and Thackeray. It is a method that will certainly be adopted by other writers, but will the first effort meet with recognition. I scarcely think so" (qtd. in Hone 150). Moore was right on both counts. Firstly, his method would be adopted by other writers and the subject of the decadent's search for ever rarer sensations in an attempt rid himself of ennui would became a quintessential *fin de siècle* theme among decadents and other writers. Secondly, it would be Wilde and not Moore who would receive popular recognition for innovating this theme and producing the first British decadent novel in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).

Moore's strong belief in his novel was crushed, however, by the negative reception it received. Though the novel, as Hone notes, "had a small commercial success," the critics, including Moore's friends were, for the most part, hard on it (Hone 161). An exception here was the reviewer for the *Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, a journal which, as I have pointed out earlier, was one of the main promoters of decadence. Though for the most part the article was a summary of Moore's unfair treatment at the hands of a hypocritically moral public and a celebration of Moore as one who "invent[s] and project[s] fresh ideas," the review ultimately pronounces *Mike Fletcher* the best work that Moore has yet done (62, 63). Moore, however took the bad, not the good, reviews to heart and disavowed the book that he had once thought had so much promise. The novel he had hoped would give him literary and cultural authority had failed and Moore began to rethink his literary identity. Moore now regarded himself merely as a "man of talent" rather than a "man of genius" and felt he should choose his subjects accordingly. His downfall, as he told his mother was that he had only a "dash of genius" (qtd. in Hone 150). "Even in the hands of a man of talent," Moore wrote in an essay on Balzac, "the abnormal easily slips into sterile eccentricity, which is the dreariest form of commonplace" (qtd. in Hone 176). He had difficulty, he confessed to his brother, achieving his literary ideals: "I have the sentiment of great work, but I cannot produce it" (qtd. in Hone 167).

Disavowing, then, his attempts to combine naturalism with the decadent and abnormal style and subject matter of Huysmans and the aestheticism of Pater, Moore told Clara Lanza, "[a]ll experimentation is now over and henceforth I shall only sow seeds in the garden that is suitable to my talent" (qtd. in Hone 176). So determined was Moore to reconstruct his literary identity that he entirely disavowed *Mike Fletcher*. As Hone notes, *Mike Fletcher* was "the only one of [Moore's] novels which he never wished to revise, and the only one of his books, not excluding the poems, of which in his old age he preferred never to speak" (161). The novel was never reprinted. In addition, Moore would gloss over the whole experimental period between *Confessions* and *Esther Waters* (1894). Thus, in *A Communication to My Friends* (1933), Moore gives "the impression that *Esther Waters* was the immediate successor of the *Confessions* and *A Drama in Muslin*," neglecting his decadent-aesthetic novels of the 1880s like *Mike Fletcher* and *A Mere Accident* (Hone 175). With the failure of *Mike Fletcher*, then, Moore's experimentation with decadence came to an end and he left it to others to take up the "abnormal" and "eccentric" subject matter of the decadent novel. So thoroughly did he reinvent himself that the significance of his role in the creation of the decadent novel is largely forgotten.

The introduction of the decadent type in Lee's *Miss Brown* and Moore's *Confessions* was part of an overall project to advance the English novel, though the writers differed on what might constitute this advancement. For Lee, the decadent type functioned as a negative type as she attempted to find a happy medium between the too overt frankness of the French novel and the too timid reticence of the English novel. For Moore, on the other hand, the decadent was the happy medium between an overly journalistic Zolaesque style and the Paterian aestheticism that he admired. Certainly Lee and Moore were not the only artists involved in trying to pave the way for the advancement of the English novel in this period, a project challenged by the power of the circulating libraries and the National Vigilance Association as well as by the increasing commercialization of literature. The decadent that figured so strongly for both Lee and Moore in their attempts to advance the novel would continue to be a prominent presence as writers took sides in this battle to assert the dominant definition of writer and the dominant mode of fiction in the period.

Part 2
Competing Fictions of Decadence
Chapter 2
Popular Fictions of Decadence

Moore's difficulty in getting *Mike Fletcher* published and his negative experience regarding its reception led him to abandon, in 1889, what he called the "aesthetic novel" (a combination of naturalism and the increasingly decadent aestheticism of writers like Walter Pater) and to take up the "ordinary, everyday story" suitable to "the man of talent" (qtd. in Hone 176). Ironically, Moore's abandonment of the decadent novel in 1889 coincided with the emergence of "Decadence with particular reference to a literary movement" in England (Thornton, "Decadence" 19). But if decadence was achieving the status of a movement at this time it was, for the most part, a poetic literary movement and, while there was interest in bringing decadence to fiction, the publishing prospects for this kind of fiction were weak. Decadence was quicker to influence poetry at this time because of its less obvious interest to the popular readership who might be corrupted by it.[1] The novel, by contrast, was under more scrutiny because of its more popular generic status and because its increasing cheapness made it more accessible. Moore's experience speaks to the difficulty writers faced in trying to advance the British novel, difficulties imposed by vocal members of the British public and literary community anxious about the purview of fiction and as well as by a relatively cautious publishing industry. The firms that would take on controversial new fiction were, as I have argued, just beginning to emerge in the late 1880s, and, even then, the figure of imprisoned publisher Vizetelly (jailed in 1889) must have loomed large for the new enterprising publishers like Heinemann and Lane. It would take some time before the proponents of decadent fiction and the new publishers found their way towards each other. Those writers of the literary élite, then, who at this time may have wanted to develop the novel in the direction of decadence either experienced failure in getting such works published or proceeded with extreme caution in charting out their literary careers.

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[1] The Rhymers' Club, for example, a group which included a number of decadent poets, was particularly active in these years, producing two anthologies of poetry, *The Book of the Rhymers Club* in 1892 and *The Second Book of the Rhymers Club* in 1894. See Bruce Gardiner's *The Rhymers' Club* for a detailed examination of this group.

If the decadents among the literary élite were slower and more cautious in their attempts to bring decadence to the English novel because of the fierce hostility aimed at French literary trends of any kind, the same cannot be said of the popular discourse against decadence and the representations of decadence this discourse inspired in popular fiction. If decadence as a literary movement emerged in 1889 among a small group of poets, it emerged in a grander more sensational manner in the following year when the controversy over Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* gave a name and a face to decadence for a broader public not attuned to the more intellectual, philosophical, and artistic weight it was being given by a portion of the literary élite who were considering how decadence might be used to expand the purview of British fiction. In many respects, then, this counter-discourse preceded the efforts of many of the decadents to bring decadence to British fiction.

That a counter-discourse to decadence existed almost before decadence itself did in the British context is a testament to the powerful models of resistance already in place from attacks on the earlier controversial literary movements of aestheticism and naturalism. The counter-decadent discourse developed in the early 1890s derived largely from these earlier models, refining and perfecting them as they took on a new form of pernicious literature.[2] Increasingly, however, as counter-decadence emerged as a distinct discourse, attacks on decadence were characterized by vicious personal attacks on the character and the lifestyle of the writer, attacks inspired by the theories of writers like

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[2] Lyn Pykett also insists on the importance of the anti-naturalism discourses of the 1880s in shaping the attack on the literary trends of the 1890s: "the debate about naturalism continued to shape the critical discourse on the novel throughout the nineties and was particularly prominent in the controversies about the New Fiction and the fiction of sex, which were seen by many commentators as the offspring of naturalism" ("Representing the Real" 168). Though she focuses on debates about naturalism, the same phenomenon can be observed in the case of the discourse against aestheticism. Perhaps one of the most striking illustrations of this phenomenon is Harry Quilter's 1880 invocation of the term "the gospel of intensity" to describe aestheticism and his re-use of this term in 1895 to describe decadence. The first article attacking aestheticism appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* and was entitled "The New Renaissance; or the Gospel of Intensity," while the second article, "The Gospel of Intensity," which attacked the decadent school appeared in *The Contemporary Review* in June 1895. Quilter refers back to his earlier piece in the 1895 article, clearly connecting decadence with the degenerate aestheticism that he wrote about in 1880, describing decadence as the "evil result" of the earlier movement (763).

Césare Lombroso and Max Nordau which linked artistic genius with criminality and insanity. In this counter-decadent discourse, the decadent continued to function in important ways to address issues of readership, authorship, ethics and aesthetics and high and low culture. The combination of the morally censorious attitude towards Bohemian artists among the middle-class readership and the salacious interest in their lives, an interest I have discussed earlier, ensured that these sensationalized negative representations of decadence would have a powerful sway, taking hold of the popular imagination to become the dominant view of decadence. Because of the powerful influence these counter-discourses had on the representation of the decadence in fiction and their centrality in the public perception of decadence, I will take them up first before going on to discuss the development of decadence by decadents, a subject I will develop in the following two chapters.

In this chapter, I will examine the counter-decadent representations in two venues: the male-dominated newspapers and periodicals and the popular fiction of women writers. In the case of the former, I focus on the development of a specifically counter-decadent discourse developed from critiques against aestheticism and naturalism in the reception of Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*, a story whose reception functioned to bring something now identified as "decadence" to the broader public. Largely constructed by the male conservative opponents of decadence within the literary élite, this critical counter-discourse was part of a battle for cultural authority and the struggle to assert the dominant definition of writer as conservative members of the élite tried to oppose the new emerging literary trends popular with a young up-and-coming élite. As such, it was part of a kind of macho jockeying for position in which what was a stake was dominance within an already dominant position in the field.

A similar counter-discourse, I argue, was also taken up by popular women writers who, largely deprived of a voice in these literary intellectual organs dominated by male writers and critics, voiced their resistance to decadence in fiction. Though decadents and women writers may (especially the socially progressive new women writers), as Dowling argues, have been linked in the popular imagination as "twin apostles of social apocalypse," in their views of art, they were, as I have suggested earlier, often radically opposed ("Decadent" 447). For many women writers, decadence was regarded as a high artistic hyper-male discourse which deliberately excluded women writers, denigrated the interest of women writers in using fiction as a vehicle for social change and moral reform, and dismissed what women regarded as artistic. In many respects, then, there was more at stake in the battle against decadence for women writers than there were for male critics who often shared a disdain for women's writing with their decadent counterparts among the literary élite. In a literary field largely structured around a gendered hierarchy women always had a lower status than men even if they circulated in the realms of the élite like Vernon Lee. In this chapter I will focus on the exploitation of the decadent figure by two popular women writers--Marie Corelli and Sarah Grand--and will demonstrate how they created popular fictions of decadence around the issues of aesthetics and ethics as part of their struggle to gain cultural authority and to impose their view of the dominant definition of writer. I will also consider how these interventions were received by a press which generally regarded women's writing with as much disdain as decadent writing, either as sensationalized popular trash or as morbid, pretentious literature.

I

"Delighting in Dirtiness and Confessing its Delight": Naming and Shaming Decadence and the Critical Reception of *Dorian Gray*

To the male conservative opponents of decadence whose reviews of Wilde's *Dorian Gray* paved the way for the introduction of the concept of literary decadence to the broader public, decadence was not new at all. Rather, it was simply a continuation of the pernicious schools that had preceded it--aestheticism and naturalism. In this respect, these opponents of decadence had available to them a number of well-rehearsed critical discourses with which to structure their attack on decadence, some of which I have discussed in the previous chapter. In addition, the prosecution of Vizetelly for publishing obscene novels by Emile Zola, Gustave Flaubert, Paul Bourget, and Guy de Maupassant in October of 1889 encouraged moralists crusading against pernicious literary schools as well as conservative critics among the literary élite. The confidence on the part of the opponents of pernicious literature, the existence of an effective anti-pernicious literature discourse, the existence of a "yellow" press eager to sensationalize any topic, and the identification of a name for this new form of perniciousness now being called "decadence" (a term which had not been in broad circulation at the time of Moore's experimentations with literary decadence), were important factors in the demonization of decadence that began with the 1890 reception of Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*, a book that Samuel Henry Jeyes accused of "delight[ing] in dirtiness and "confess[ing] its delight" (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 71).

The confluence of these factors contributed to make Wilde's *Dorian Gray* the first widely recognized work of decadent fiction rather than Moore's *Mike Fletcher*, a fate Moore had predicted for himself when he told his mother that he believed his "new method" would be adopted by other writers and that he would not be recognized as its originator (Hone 150). In addition to the serendipity of timing, Wilde's story garnered more attention than Moore's novel no doubt because of its popular form. Where Moore's book had appeared under the imprint of Swann Sonnenschein, a publisher of serious and weighty matter and not of popular fiction, Wilde's story was cheaper and more accessible in its first appearance in the popular periodical *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. Moreover, Wilde embodied his decadence in a more popular and feminized form than Moore had, drawing on the society novels of the Ouida type and the supernatural melodrama (Moers 302).[3] Moore's novel, on the other hand, was the highly masculinized decadence of the coarse and brutally virile kind that, while deplored by many critics, did not rouse nearly as much ire as the effeminacy that critics saw in Wilde's story. Thus, although *Mike Fletcher* was what Moore biographer Adrian Frazier has called the "ABC of decadence" (194), it would be *Dorian Gray*, with its combination of the effeminacy of aestheticism and brutality of naturalism that would represent, in the popular mind, the English Bible of decadence.

Wilde's story was certainly not more decadent than Moore's. *Dorian Gray*, after all, did have a moral which was readily recognizable to those who cared to see it, as did Christian and mystical journals like the *Christian Leader*, *Light*, and *Christian World*. Moore's novel, on the contrary, was a cynical and certainly more graphic study of the decadent subject matter of "vice, ennui, suicide" (rev. of *Mike Fletcher*, *Athenaeum* 851).

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[3] Gagnier provides a detailed assessment of the influences of popular literature and culture on *Dorian Gray*, particularly women's popular cultural forms (*Idylls* 65-67).

But, in a period when there was such a strong concern about the corrupting influence of fiction on the masses, on women, and on young persons, *Dorian Gray* would cause more consternation than *Mike Fletcher* simply because it circulated more widely, presented itself in a more popular and accessible form and, what was more, a feature particularly irritating to Wilde's opponents among the literary élite, claimed status as a work of high art by virtue of its elaborate style and literary allusions.

The idea that decadence was a pernicious combination of the worst elements of aestheticism and naturalism coalesced in the reviews of *Dorian Gray*, as reviewers sought to condemn Wilde's decadence by association, employing the highly effective discourses against aestheticism and naturalism. Whereas Moore's decadence was more brutally frank, resulting in a critique more focused on the naturalistic elements of his work, Wilde's decadence was tinged more with aestheticism than naturalism. Where Moore had struggled with the aesthetic stylistics of writers like Pater and Huysmans, failing in his attempts to aestheticize the naturalist novel, Wilde handled the stylistics with ease, foregrounding them while only hinting at the frank brutality of naturalist subject matter that formed the "unsaid" in the story--the unnamed sins of his protagonist Dorian Gray.[4] Still, despite the absence of naturalism in the story, a story that is clearly part of a romantic, aestheticist and gothic tradition, the critical attack on Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* borrowed from both the discourse against aestheticism and the discourse against naturalism while, at the same time, formulating a specifically counter-decadent discourse.

Reviewers undermined Wilde's claims to cultural authority by linking the work and Wilde himself with the now out-dated but widely known aesthetic movement. Wilde, Samuel Henry Jeyes of the *St. James's Gazette* declared, was someone "we talked about" in the 1870s and whose poetry "we tried to read" in the 1880s (Beckson, *Oscar*

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[4] In a review of Moore's *Impressions and Opinions* (1891), Arthur Symons comments on Moore's inability to assert himself as the "deliverer" of those wishing to promote Continental art (274). Symons attributes Moore's failure to his inability to find an appropriate style: "All his life he has been seeking a style, and he has not yet found one. At times he drops into style as if by accident, and then he drops style as if by design. He has a passionate delight in the beauty of good prose; he has an ear for the magic of phrases; his words catch at times a troubled, expressive charm; yet he has never attained ease in writing" (274).

Wilde 68). Like the now ridiculed aesthetes, Wilde's novel was described by the *Athenaeum* as "unmanly," and as "effeminate" by the reviewers for the *St. James's Gazette* and the *Daily Chronicle* (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 82, 72). Though there would certainly be implications of homosexual elements to the novel in some of the reviews, the use of these terms in this context points to the prevailing view at the time that the unmanliness and effeminacy of the aesthetes was an indication of having too much to do with women; in other words, effeminate and unmanly men were regarded as being dangerous objects of sexual attraction to women, an element that was played up in George du Maurier's caricatures of the aesthetes in *Punch*. In addition, the *St. James's Gazette*, drawing on these same *Punch* caricatures of the languid, flower-loving aesthetes, mocked the characters of the novel who "fill up the intervals of talk by plucking daisies and playing with them, and sometimes by drinking 'something with strawberry in it'"--an incident which actually never happens in the story (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 69).

These charges of unmanliness and effeminacy were also ways of undermining the novel's status as high art, of indicating to the reader of the review that the book was of the popular and "low" type written by women writers and consumed largely by an audience of the kind of women readers Moore had railed against in his *Literature at Nurse*. Jeyes of the *St. James's Gazette*, for example, a critic among the literary élite who aggressively asserted his power to consecrate works of art in his attacks on "Yellow-Bookism, Water [sic]-Paterism, aestheticism, and all other isms and cults" that constituted "the fads and freaks which were shooting through the intellectual and artistic atmosphere in the last decade of the nineteenth century," turned his wrath on Wilde (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 67). As was the case with reviews of Moore's works, Jeyes's review set out to undermine the high art status of the book and Wilde's claims to the title of artist: "The grammar is better than Ouida's; the erudition equal," he wrote, adding further on, "Why, bless our souls! Haven't we read something of this kind somewhere in the classics? Yes, of course we have? But in what recondite author? Ah---yes---no---yes, it *was* in Horace! What an advantage to have had a classical education!" (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 69, 70).

In addition to being associated with an outmoded aestheticism and with low popular fiction, *Dorian Gray* also was linked by critics with naturalism, a genre which had been brought to the attention of the public as popular trashy fiction during the debates in Parliament over Vizetelly's publication of translations of Zola the year previously. While it is hard to imagine how reviewers understood *Dorian Gray* as naturalist in any sense, they nevertheless drew strongly on the anti-naturalist discourse, perhaps because this popular discourse had worked so effectively against Vizetelly just months before when he had been jailed for publishing "obscene" works by Zola and other French naturalist writers. W. E. Henley of the *Scots Observer* even characterized *Dorian Gray* as "medico-legal" in its "interest," a characteristic generally reserved for naturalist fiction (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 75). Invoking the familiar and sensationalizing rhetoric of the anti-naturalist and anti-Zola discourse, reviewers of *Dorian Gray* like Jeyes of the *St. James's Gazette* used terms like "ordure" and "garbage" to describe the novel (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 68, 69). The *Scots Observer*, similarly, asked, "Why go grubbing in muck heaps?" (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 75). These associations of Wilde's story with garbage echoed the attacks against Zola's works that described them as "dirt and horror" and as "inartistic garbage" (qtd. in National Vigilance Association 354). At a moment in time when the cultural authority of naturalism was so low, the association of Wilde's work with this kind of fiction, whether justified or not, functioned strategically for critics attempting to undermine Wilde's claims to high artistry.

These critics also countered Wilde's claims to assert the dominant definition of artist on moral grounds in a manner that resembled the tactic taken by the National Vigilance Association in the attack on Zola's naturalism. The *Daily Chronicle* reviewer's claim that the novel promoted a "creed which will taint every young mind that comes into contact with it" resembled the claim made against Zola's novels by Samuel Smith "that it would be impossible for any young man who had not learned the Divine secret of self-control to have read [two pages of a Zola novel] without committing some form of outward sin within twenty-four hours after" (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 73; National Vigilance Association 355). Even those like Jeyes who did not share the moralistic concerns of those worried about art's corrupting influence invoked the spectre of the National Vigilance Association: "Whether the Treasury or the Vigilance Society will think it worth while to prosecute Mr. Oscar Wilde or Messrs. Ward, Lock & Co. [the British publisher of *Lippincott's*], we do not know; but on the whole we hope they will not" (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 69). Jeyes's hope that Wilde will not be prosecuted indicates his positioning of himself within the élite pole of the field where moralistic concerns hold little weight in judging a work of art. Jeyes, unlike the moral crusaders of the National Vigilance Association and unlike the critic of the *Daily Chronicle*, thought that *Dorian Gray* and works like it were "silly" but certainly not "dangerous" (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 71). His invocation of the National Vigilance Association, even though he did not agree with its principles, indicates his sense that their moralistic discourse could function powerfully in silencing what to him was, more simply, bad art.

At the same time, however, as the reviews of *Dorian Gray* employed anti-naturalist and anti-aesthetic discourses, they also recognized its distinctness from these literary forms and had discovered the term that applied to it--decadence. The *St. James's Gazette*, the *Daily Chronicle* and the *Pall Mall Budget*, for example, all commented on the relation of Wilde's story to the literature of French decadence--a school that, in their minds, combined elements of naturalism and aestheticism. As such, decadence was characterized by them in terms of "leprous[ness]" and "garbage" on the one hand and in terms of its "sensuous and hyperdecorative manner" and "aesthetic paganism" on the other (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 72, 69, 77; rev. of *Dorian* Gray, *Pall Mall Budget* 862). With a new and more insidious literary influence to attack, the critiques against decadence developed beyond those against aestheticism and naturalism. The criticism became more personal in nature and, in the case of the reviews of *Dorian Gray*, more pointed references began to be made to an association between decadence and homosexual practices. W. E. Henley's claim that the story dealt with "matters only fit for criminal investigation department or a hearing in camera," and that it was a "story for outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph boys" was a pointed reference to the Cleveland Street scandal of 1889-1890 which involved the exposure of a house of assignation for homosexual activity (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 75). Henley was no doubt aware of rumours that had begun circulating about Wilde in certain quarters of the literary élite and he uses this knowledge to suggest that Dorian's unnamed sins are homosexual in nature.

Neither this interpretation of the novel nor indeed this interpretation of Wilde's sexuality were widespread at this time, however, even if, as Gagnier has argued, the novel was intentionally written to address both a homosexual and mainstream audience (*Idylls* 61). While some, like Henley and Wilde's more sympathetic homosexual audience, may have read the novel in the terms put forth in Queensberry's plea of justification--as an intentional effort to "describe the relations, intimacies, and passions of certain persons of sodomitical and unnatural habits, tastes and practices"--many others did not (Hyde 114). It is only after the trials that, as Sinfield argues, *Dorian Gray* becomes "deafeningly queer" making it impossible not to understand it in these terms (105, 104). Similarly, Wilde's homosexuality was also not a given and many, including Frank Harris and W. B. Yeats, did not believe in Wilde's homosexuality even after the trials had begun (Sinfield 1-2). Thus, although hints of the association between homosexuality and decadence are in evidence before the trials, "same-sex passion," as Sinfield argues, "is . . . only a minor and indeterminate element" of "the debate over decadence" (95). Thus, as I have argued in the previous chapter, we should pay close attention to charges against decadence of effeminacy and unmanliness, terms which may or may not, in this historical context, carry the same meaning as they have come to in the twentieth century. And though Wilde may have used decadence to promote a "gay" discourse, the same cannot be said of many writers who wrote decadent fiction.

Regardless of what reviewers like those of the *Athenaeum* and the *Daily Chronicle* intended in their charges against *Dorian Gray* of unmanliness and effeminacy, the construction of a vicious, threatening, and ridiculing counter-discourse to decadence, not only in the mainstream press but also in highly regarded literary periodicals presided over by those with a high degree of cultural authority, certainly slowed the emergence of a decadent fiction by decadents. Similarly, the reception of *Dorian Gray* would greatly colour the way these works were received when indeed they were finally published. As I have demonstrated, the critique of decadence as constructed by the critics of the male literary intellectual élite undermined the cultural authority of decadence and decadent writers by aligning decadence with low fiction of various kinds--from the trashy naturalism of Zola and his school to the commercialized, popularized and feminized aestheticism of Ouida--in an attempt to expel these writers from the literary élite.

Due to its sensationalized nature, this counter-decadent discourse would, somewhat ironically, nourish a popular fiction centred on the figure of the decadent artist and his corrupt and bohemian lifestyle. This trend troubled Samuel Henry Jeyes who commented on the "Puritan prurience" of a British public that were attracted to works that claimed to be moral critiques of decadence and perniciousness but which also relished in gory details of their "disgusting" subject matter (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 71). These hypocritical works were almost as bad in his mind as Wilde's more "frank paganism" (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 71). These treatments of the sordid, corrupt, or sometimes just bohemian lifestyles of a negatively stereotyped decadent abounded in the popular fiction of the period, forming a significant sub-genre of the plethora of fiction that focused on the figure of the writer that I mentioned in the previous chapter. Most of these works were unexceptional. This popularized stereotype of decadence was more palatable to the at once prurient and morally censorious forces that prevailed in late-Victorian culture. Like aestheticism before it, then, decadence was taken up, albeit in a modified fashion, by middle-class culture.

Many of these popular novels, it is true, merely capitalized on the prurient interest in the bohemian lifestyle of the decadent. Works like Morely Roberts's *In Low Relief: A Bohemian Transcript* (1890), for example, do little beyond rehashing what were, even in 1890, rather tired stereotypes of the decadent. Roberts was a popular novelist and short-story writer--one of the best-paid of the 1890s, according to John Sutherland--who wrote a number of successful but now forgettable stories about artists and writers much to the chagrin of his struggling writer friend, George Gissing (540). Roberts's popular books treat the subject of the artist in a superficial manner in comparison with work like Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891), a work that had very little appeal to a popular audience at the time it was written. The protagonist of *In Low Relief*, John Torrington, for example, is a starving writer with a fierce hatred of the bourgeoisie who is devoted to high artistic principles. His work and, more importantly, his life which has been "a Walpurgis night, a dance of death, a maniacal, demoniacal rout, of all the virtues and all the vices, who have fought for conquest and precedence in the kingdom of my soul," reflect his interest in decadent principles (60). Because *In Low Relief* is a popular novel, however, the reader is, of course, prevented from exploring the full depths of Torrington's decadence, a decadence only hinted at. Primarily, the novel uses the decadent artist as a doomed romantic figure whose attempts to find love with an artist's model fail because of her love for another man, a successful, commercial artist. Roberts was one of a number of writers, including the more famous George du Maurier of *Trilby* (1894) fame, who exploited decadent and bohemian lifestyles in a largely sanitized fiction catered for a popular audience.

II

Women Writing Against Decadence: The Decadent in Popular Fiction by Women Writers

But while there were many novels of the Roberts and du Maurier type that cashed in on the vogue for fiction about decadent and bohemian artists, there were also many popular writers who used the subject of the decadent and decadence more strategically as part of the battle for cultural authority within the literary field. Chief among these were women writers whose view of decadence was more polemical than that of writers like Roberts and du Maurier but which also differed significantly from the counter-decadent view taken by those conservative critics of the literary élite. Women writers, for example, far from seeing the decadents as in danger of being expelled from the literary élite, thought that they held an unrivalled position as respected artists who seemed rather to dominate the field. Women writers felt that their interests in art with a purpose (whether social, moral, or didactic) were not taken seriously in a field that seemed to be dominated by art-for-art's sake principles. So too, while male critics insisted on the effeminacy of decadence and on its status as a low, popular genre associated with women, women writers, on the contrary, regarded its as a hyper-male artistic discourse that completely excluded women. Denigrated for their art by male decadents who associated women writers with popular and didactic fiction and by counter-decadents who frequently aligned women writers with decadents, the problem of the decadent for women was twofold. Though desperate to distinguish their art from that of the decadents with which it was associated as either morbid, degenerate, and neurotic in some instances or as silly, sensationalistic trash in others, they were largely denied access to the male intellectual critical venues where they might defend themselves and represent their own views on art.[5] Few had the critical clout of a Vernon Lee, a woman writer who circulated among the literary élite though, even she, as I have described, often suffered abuse at the hands of her male peers.

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[5] New Woman writing, for example, was implicated in the attack on decadence which began in the months preceding and reached its height during the Wilde trials. J. A.

Many women writers, then, had to voice their criticism in venues which were regarded as acceptably feminine and many, consequently, engaged in the battle for cultural authority through fiction, a genre with low hierarchical status within the literary field, particularly when taken up by women writers who, it was thought, "compromised the novel's claims as a serious art form and its possibilities for aesthetic development" (Pykett, *Engendering Fictions* 55). Fighting against these prejudices women writers embodied their arguments against the male domination of the literary élite in their fiction. In this fiction, women struggled to assert the validity of their own claims as artists often attempting, as Lee had done, to bring the ethical and the aesthetic into relation. Decadence served women writers in a number of ways in these fictions. In many respects, the decadent, an immediately identifiable and broadly denigrated stereotype, functioned in these works as a scapegoat standing in for the broader male literary élite and its antagonism towards women writers. There were, however, more specific strategic impulses behind the representation of the decadent by women writers. For writers like Corelli, who desired the cultural authority the decadents seemed to hold among the male literary élite, the appropriation of, engagement with, and moralization of decadence functioned, in part, as an attempt to accrue the symbolic capital associated with a supposedly high art form while at the same time asserting her own moralized version of a high art aesthetic. For other women writers like Grand who were altogether more suspicious of the category of the "aesthetic" as endorsed by decadents but who were, at the same time, associated in the public mind with the decadents, the decadent was a

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Spender's "New Fiction" controversy in the *Westminster Gazette* in early 1895 identified what he called "the revolting woman" novel as one of three classes of decadent fiction, the others being the "defiant man novel" and the "morbid and lurid" class of novel. Hugh E. M. Stutfield and James Ashcroft Noble also aligned new women and decadents in articles written in this period--"Tommyrotics" and "The Fiction of Sexuality." Some articles focused specifically on women's fiction as degenerate and/or decadent such as Thomas Bradfield's "A Dominant Note of Some Recent Fiction" in the *Westminster Review*, Janet E. Hogarth's "Literary Degenerates," and W. F. Barry's "The Strike of a Sex." New Women and decadents shared public attention in 1894 and 1895, a period in which both types were endlessly vilified, parodied, and analysed in the press.

necessary figure in a fiction that sought to distinguish between the projects of the new woman writer and the decadent.

(i) Marie Corelli's *Wormwood*: A Counter-Decadent Discourse?

One of the first and most significant engagements with decadence by a woman writer after Vernon Lee's *Miss Brown* is found in Marie Corelli's *Wormwood: A Drama of Paris*, published in October 1890, just a few months after the appearance of and controversy over Wilde's *Dorian Gray*. Like Lee's *Miss Brown*, a popular novel that had represented the decadent type in formation, Corelli's novel charts the degeneration of the decadent literary man. Like the vast array of popular representations of the decadent artist in fiction at this time, Corelli focuses on the corrupt lifestyle of the decadent--in this case his absinthe addiction and his personal degeneration--rather than his literary endeavours. While the novel was not as hugely popular as Corelli's later works would be, the first three-volume edition of *Wormwood* of 1500 copies sold out in ten days. The novel went through seven editions between 1890, when it was first published, and 1895, the year of the Wilde trial. It continued to sell after this and was in its twenty-third edition by the time of her death. Annette Federico argues that "*Wormwood* . . . is an excellent example of middle-class curiosity about and appropriations of decadence" (72). And certainly, for Corelli's many readers, it would be this popularized and sensationalized image of decadence that would colour the way they would understood decadence in its less popular forms as this fiction emerged in the following years.

Though the novel was recognized primarily as a novelistic tract against the dangers of absinthe, it also represents a vigorous attack against the French realist school and its English imitators.[6] Corelli comments on this two-fold purpose in a letter to her publisher Richard Bentley in which she expresses her intention to expose "the absinthe trail which lies all over France and makes French literature obscene and French art repulsive" (qtd. in Sadleir 141). Published, however, just as ideas about decadence were beginning to circulate more broadly among the public, the novel also participates in the developing counter-decadent discourse, particularly since the protagonist Gaston Beauvais bears all the signs of the stereotype decadent-- from his degenerate lifestyle and morbid interests to his promise to give his readers a glimpse of "loathesome worms and unsightly poisonous growths" as he lays himself on the "modern dissecting table" for their perusal (1:14). I say that Beauvais is decadent because naturalist writers, though thought by many to be writers of immoral books, were not generally characterized as immoral themselves. The moral character of naturalist writers like Zola was not impugned in the attacks on naturalism in the way that came to be characteristic in attacks on decadence as my examination of the reception of *Dorian Gray* has indicated. The attack on the artist's moral character and Bohemian lifestyle represents an important distinction in the evolution of the moralistic discourse against "pernicious" forms of art and distinguishes the critical attack on decadence from the critical attack on naturalism.

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[6] Reviews in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Literary World*, the *Academy*, the *Athenaeum* and the *County Gentlewoman* all focused on the novel's exposure of the dangers of absinthe. The *Literary World*, for example, opened its review with attention to this matter:

> This strong romance, by Miss Marie Corelli, is a study . . . of the horrible demoralization and the reversion to brute types of the modern Parisians, caused by the absinthe habit. The pallid green liquor, that seems like the soul of a serpent, establishes its power almost immediately, and leaves the victim a witch-dance of brilliant and diabolical illusions, terminating in lesion of the brain, a fixed idea, idiocy, and death. (21)

This distinction was an effect of the popular pseudo-scientific discourse of Césare Lombroso and others that was emerging in the late 1880s and early 1890s, the same time as literary decadence was becoming a focus of attention. This discourse pathologized the "man of genius" (this was the title of Lombroso's book), in particular the man of artistic genius, and the artist's works were both signs and symptoms of his criminality and insanity. This argument was the basis of Max Nordau's notorious book *Degeneration* (1893), a book that appeared in English translation at the time of Wilde's trial. The book, though disparaged by many British critics, sold very well, substantiating the increasingly popular view that writers and artists of many of the nineteenth-century literary and artistic schools were degenerates. Corelli's representation of the decadent Gaston Beauvais is in keeping with this development of the counter-discourse on decadence as his narrative is the direct result of his degenerate lifestyle--both sign and symptom of his decadence. On a larger scale, in which *Wormwood* functions as an allegory of the decline of a great nation with Beauvais as modern French Everyman, Corelli also, in her introductory note to the first edition of the novel, describes the vile literature of France as a direct product of the depravity of the French people (v-vi). In the British context, the fate of France stands as a lesson to Britain at a time when controversies about the influence of French and Continental writers on British literature were in full swing.

In its critique of literary schools, the novel serves as an articulation of Corelli's position within the literary field as she battled for cultural authority as a popular woman novelist. Corelli's position was, as I have suggested earlier, a complex one, for she was trying to maintain a position that, within the context of the literary field of the 1890s, was contradictory. Like those among the literary élite, Corelli valorized high art and claimed to be economically disinterested. Unlike these writers, however, who relied on the critical judgement of highbrow critics, Corelli believed in the power of the masses to recognize high art and believed in the didactic and moral power of literature. In *The Silver Domino* (1892), for example, Corelli expressed her belief that the effects of Universal education on the "masses" had been significant and that their literary tastes were now, in fact, superior to the tastes of the "cultured": "The 'bas-peuple' *are* reading and reading the books that have made national destinies [e.g. Epictetus, Seneca, Mazzini, Carlyle, Emerson]--they *are* learning, and they are not afraid to express opinions" (97).[7] For Corelli, her popularity with the masses assured her status as "Artist" as surely as did her unpopularity with the literary élite and with highbrow critics, a point she made repeatedly in novels, interviews, and other public forums. In *The Sorrows of Satan*, for example, a bookseller says of Corelli's idealized female artist figure in the novel (widely recognized as a portrait of Corelli herself), "Miss Clare is too popular to need reviews. Besides, a large number of the critics--the 'log-rollers' especially, are mad against her for her success, and the public know it" (139).

Though Corelli was criticized for these kinds of obviously personal diatribes that often sat awkwardly within her fiction, as a popular woman writer largely disparaged by critics, fiction had to serve as her voice. In Corelli's mind, the critics and men of the literary élite were in collusion and the whole literary field corrupt, a view she put forth forcefully in *The Sorrows of Satan*. Publishers' readers were bitter writers themselves, jealous and unwilling to promote good writing. Overall, it was a system that "foster[ed] mediocrities and suppresse[ed] originality" (*Sorrows* 6). Publishers themselves were unscrupulous cheaters of authors, and the critical milieu was filled with 'logrollers'--those who promoted their friends and slashed everyone else--and with critics whose praise could be bought. But what Corelli most resented was the fact that male writers among the literary élite so often served as critics. In "The 'Strong' Book of the Ishbosheth," Corelli describes these writer/critics as "a mere group of low sensualists, who haunt Fleet Street bars and restaurants, and who out of that sodden daily and nightly experience get a few temporary jobs on the press and 'pose' as a cult and censorship of art" (251). Corelli's point is, of course, not unfounded as many of these writers did act as critics in addition to their own literary pursuits and her description is an accurate reflection of the activities of such decadents as Arthur Symons, Richard Le Gallienne (who even called himself "Logroller" in his weekly column for the *Star*), and John Davidson. Nonetheless, she invests the writer-critics with somewhat more symbolic capital than they actually held given that they also, as I have indicated, suffered significant abuse at the hands of critics.

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[7] Here Corelli refers to the publications of Walter Scott of Newcastle-upon-Tyne who published cheap one shilling editions of these writers.

Corelli's outrage at the inequities of the literary field seems out of proportion given her spectacular success as an author, but it speaks to the importance she invested in the symbolic capital that critical success and peer recognition represented. Though Corelli accused male writers of the literary élite of hypocrisy in declaring "the public an 'ass' while . . . desiring . . . the said 'ass's' applause and approval," likewise she declared the literary élite an "ass" all the while seeking their approval (*Sorrows* 39). Thus, despite her public condemnation of the decadents and others among the male-dominated literary élite, Corelli privately courted many of these literary figures. She sent a copy of *Wormwood*, for example, to Arthur Symons, decadent and "Ishbosheth" *extraordinaire*. Furthermore, at various points in her career she entered into negotiations with John Lane and Grant Richards, publishers largely associated with the kind of art she claimed to despise. Writing to Lane that she believed she was "his favourite aversion," Corelli tries to assure Lane of her artistic legitimacy by adopting the economically disinterested discourse of the literary élite: "If I am an 'aversion' of yours, still you must try to remember that I have quite other aims in view than those of [making] money or fame--such that in my work I care nothing for myself at all--as to whether I am praised or blamed, bricked or crowned" (letter to John Lane, March 1900).

The contradictions that governed Corelli's manoeuvrings within the literary field come into play in *Wormwood*, a novel that is characterized by competing discourses of decadence and counter-decadence: that of the narrating absinthe-addicted decadent writer and that of Corelli the writer of a novel with moralistic intentions. These two discourses operate uneasily within a text that while attacking decadence seems, at the same time, to have many of the qualities of decadence. As though aware of this problem and fearing she might be perceived as decadent in presenting her narrative from the decadent's point of view, Corelli goes out of her way to make her moralistic intentions clear in such extra-textual novelistic features as the introduction, the dedication, and the epigraph. The introduction, for example, launches an attack on the French, characterizing them as a decadent nation: "The morbidness of the modern French mind is well-known and universally admitted . . . the open atheism, heartlessness, flippancy, and flagrant immorality of the whole modern school of thought is unquestioned" (v-vi). She then goes on to describe the decadent cultural products of this degenerate nation: "The shop-windows and bookstalls of Paris are of themselves sufficient witnesses of the national taste in art and literature,--a national taste for vice and indecent vulgarity" (vi). Furthermore, she speaks of the frightening invasion of "French habits, French fashions, French books, French pictures . . . [and] French drug-taking" into British cultural life (viii). Finally, as if her condemnation of her subject matter were not clear enough, she reminds her readers that she, as writer of the novel, is not to be confused with her protagonist: "When an author depicts a character, he is not of necessity that character himself . . . . I have nothing whatsoever to do with the wretched 'Gaston Beauvais' beyond the portraiture of him in his own lurid colours" (ix).

In addition, the dedication--"A messieurs les absintheurs de Paris, ces fanfarons du vice qui sont la honte et le désespoir de leur patrie [To the gentlemen, the absintheurs of Paris, these braggarts of depravity who are the shame and despair of their country]" (xiv)--further emphasizes Corelli's moral intention, while the epigraph, a quotation from the book of Revelation (8.11) helps to set an apocalyptic tone to the narrative: "And the name of the star is called WORMWOOD: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter" (xiii).

Corelli at times interjects moral elements into the narrative, somewhat straining the credibility of her protagonist who is supposed to be "conscious of no emotion whatsoever" and who loves "things that make weak souls shudder and cry" (1:15). Thus, she has Beauvais speak out in occasional moralistic rants against that which he loves: the "loathesome literature" that "Paris feeds her brain on" and "the pernicious drug [absinthe] that make[s] of man a beast" (3:172).

Corelli's moralistic discourse and her sensationalistic tale which are clearly catered towards a popular audience mark her as a producer of low art for the masses. And yet, this discourse sits uneasily within a text that, as Annette Federico has pointed out, is, in many respects, "packaged as the very flower of decadence"--from its physical appearance (green with a serpent on the cover and with a red ribbon, like those found on absinthe bottles) to its "dependen[ce] on decadent tropes" (*Idol* 72, 73). Like the novels of those among the literary élite that were charged with decadence, *Wormwood* is a study in morbid psychology. Beauvais promises, as writer of his story, to provide a decadent realist narrative that will "strip his soul naked" in his account of "the history of his life and thought" (1:13). Though the rhetoric here is similar to Moore's description of *Confessions of a Young Man*, the results are decidedly different. Where Moore gives us more of the thought and the structure of the decadent sensibility, Corelli gives us more of the lifestyle of the decadent as imagined by a prurient middle-class readership. Hers is a novel to feed what Jeyes described in his review of *Dorian Gray* as the British public's "Puritan prurience" (Beckson, *Oscar Wilde* 71). Still, the novel is ambivalent in its relationship to decadence for, even while denouncing the figure of the decadent, Corelli nonetheless, as Federico argues, evokes the "seductive powers" of absinthe (74). In addition, her lurid accounts of the absinthe-fired reveries of Beauvais may be regarded as attempts to exploit the stylistic extravagance and imagery associated with decadence as in the following description of the kind of decadent femme fatale figure that Oscar Wilde would make famous in *Salomé* (1893):

> and out on that yellow-glittering water rests one solitary gondola, black as a floating hearse, yet holding light! She, that fair siren in white robes, with bosom bare to the amorous moon-rays,--she with her wicked, laughing eyes and jewel-wreathed tresses,--is she not a beautiful wanton enough for at least an hour's joy? Hark!--she sings,--and the tremulous

> richness of her silver-toned mandoline quivers in accord with her voice across the bright dividing wave. (2:3-4)

Of course Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons or any of the other writers associated with decadence would not have written this passage in quite this way. There would be more of the archaic, more of the preciousness of form than is found in Corelli's poor man's or, more properly, bourgeois decadence.

If Corelli's attempts at a decadent stylization render her so-called critique of decadence ambiguous, so too do her attempts to demonstrate her cultural authority in her praising of the French decadent poet Charles Cros--a friend of Rimbaud's who was an absinthe addict--whom she quotes extensively in the novel. Furthermore, she does so not in the voice of her protagonist but in her own voice by way of a footnote in which she laments the death of an artist so "young and full of promise," "a perished genius," who was "never encouraged or recognized in his lifetime" (1:105). Given that Corelli quotes from "*Lendemain*," Cros's poem about absinthe, she was probably aware that he was an absinthe addict. Federico explains Corelli's seemingly contradictory reverential attitude towards an absinthe-addicted French poet as a sign of her "susceptibil[ity] to the myth of the perished genius" (*Idol* 75). I would add further that it signals her awareness of and her desire to accrue the cultural capital afforded to those of the literary élite, among whom the recognition and promotion of obscure and neglected writers and artists functions as capital and therefore as a sign of one's artistic and cultural authority.

Corelli's seemingly contradictory impulses in the novel--her moralistic intentions on the one hand and her decadence on the other--may in fact signal her desire to appeal both to the public and to the literary avant-garde. While the sensationalistic and moralistic aspects of the novel appeal directly to her popular readership and ensure popular acceptance, Corelli's employment of decadent tropes may be seen as an appeal to highbrow literary critics and to "Artists" among the élite (writers like Arthur Symons to whom she sent a copy of the book) whom she believed would recognize and approve of her apparent knowledge of French decadent verse.

As might be expected, middle-brow periodicals--those who would pruriently engage in Corelli's examination of decadence while applauding her moralistic treatment of the subject--fell over themselves in praise of the novel and took it as a realistic presentation of the dangers of absinthe and as a verisimilar portrait of the decadent type. The *Graphic* lauded Corelli's "courage" in treating a decadent subject from the point of view of the decadent and found her "frantic" style "appropriate to the homicidal maniac whom she has made his own biographer" (624). Similarly, the *Literary World* applauded Corelli for her exposure of the dangers of absinthe but also for her attack on "its more widespread and subtle secondary phase--the corruption and debasement of literature and art" as practiced by a literary school of decadents who "offer . . . to the public the rinsings of the absinthe-glasses of their Parisian masters" (21). Corelli's decadent subject matter is such, argues the reviewer, that the prefatory note in which Corelli "warn[s] the readers . . . against the misapprehension . . . that the author is represented by the dramatic utterances of those characters, or has witnessed the details which are described" is necessary (21-22). Corelli's engagement with decadence is thus convincing to this reviewer who compares Corelli's work with that of the French decadents, with the qualifying note that Corelli employs this type of art to a "worthy end" (22). Equally convinced was the reviewer for the society magazine *Kensington Society* whose very review echoes Corelli's pseudo-decadent style: "Corelli's eloquently vigorous language flows through the . . . present thrilling work in lava torrents of bitter passion and pitiless revenge. The reader is whirled about like a leaflet amidst lurid flashes and wild gusts of maddened invective, almost blinded by the efforts he or she makes to realise the tempest which rages through the man possessed of the 'liquid fire'" (qtd. in advertisement for *Wormwood* in *Academy* 554). Corelli's book was the perfect product for the "Puritan prurience" that Jeyes found so prevalent. For these reviewers of middle-brow periodicals, Corelli had provided all the sin, sensation, and luridness her audience associated with decadence while tempering it with the compensatory moral.

If Corelli's success in middle-brow periodicals that found her representation of the degenerate decadent realistic but also moralistic is not surprising, her success in highbrow literary periodicals is more so. Corelli received praise in both the *Athenaeum*, the most influential of literary reviews, and the *Academy*, a periodical that, under the influence of Andrew Lang, George Saintsbury, and Edmund Gosse, was characterized by its "systematic intention to raise the general 'trashy' and 'coarse' level of the English novel . . . to that of the French" (Sutherland 6). The reviewers for both these influential literary journals were convinced that Corelli's sensationalistic novel was realistic. The *Athenaeum* reviewer called it a "grim, realistic drama" (661), while J. Barrow Allen of the *Academy* described it as a "psychological study," a genre largely associated at this time with the works of highbrow writers like Henry James and Paul Bourget (Barrow, rev. of *Wormwood* 500). Though Allen would soon come to adopt the more characteristic derisive attitude towards Corelli that emerged in the élite periodical press--as when he said in a review of *Barabbas* three years later that Corelli's "works are not likely to obtain any permanent place in literature" (Barrow, rev. of *Barabbas* 583)--his praise and the praise of the *Athenaeum* reviewer for *Wormwood* demands some consideration. What made these critics regard as realistic what the reviewers for the yellow-journalistic *Pall Mall Gazette* and the highbrow *Times* mocked umercilessly as ludicrous, with the *Times* reviewer declaring *Wormwood* a book for the "railway bookstalls" (13)?

The praise of Corelli's anti-decadent *Wormwood* by these reviewers for the two foremost literary journals attests, I think, to the strong resistance to the emerging decadence, even within the literary élite. Though Saintsbury, Gosse, and Lang praised French literature, it was the French literature of an earlier generation. All were, in varying degrees, hostile to naturalism and to the emerging decadence on the grounds that it was too highly focused on the vicious aspects of life. "Be vicious and have done with it," urged Saintsbury, declaring that the French novel of the 1880s and 1890s was in a "less healthy condition" than even the English, while Gosse urged novelists to "enlarg[e] . . . the sphere of the their labours" beyond the subject matter of "amatory intrigue" (Saintsbury 431, Gosse 528). Though it is hard to say how they would have taken Corelli's novel which, though it has a moral, is nonetheless an exploration of the vicious side of life, their critical view of realism and emerging schools of fiction indicates that there was a more conservative element among the literary élite that was not averse to moralized treatments of the kinds of issues dealt with in naturalist and decadent fiction. As Diderik Roll-Hansen argues in his study of the *Academy*, the literary criticism in the *Academy* of the 1880s and 1890s was "on the whole fairly conventional" and represented the ideals of the old literary avant-garde whose "supercilious" anti-Philistinism was of a different order than that more "vigorous radicalism" of the young literary élite of decadents like Arthur Symons (210-11).

In this context, Corelli's counter-decadence may have represented a welcome corrective to the vicious French and continental literary trends that many, from highbrow critics like Gosse, Saintsbury, and Lang to lowbrow novelists like Corelli, feared were becoming an all too pervasive influence on British writers. And though the reviewers for the *Academy* and *Athenaeum* described Corelli's novel itself as realist while praising it, it must have seemed to them to represent a better sort of realism than that of its French counterparts (and their English imitators) in its moralized view of the social ill of absinthism and the literary ill of decadent realism. To proponents of decadence like Arthur Symons and Havelock Ellis, whose views I will discuss in the next chapter, such moralizing had no place in a literature in need of "treating the facts of life with the . . . frankness and boldness characteristic of the French novel" (Ellis 59).

The counter-decadence that emerged in about 1890 was, then, quite widespread, finding its way into popular periodicals, newspapers, and fiction and even into more highbrow venues and making strange bedfellows out of lowbrow novelists like Corelli and highbrow critics like Lang, Gosse, and Saintsbury. Though highbrow critics did not, for the most part, engage in the kind of mud-slinging that characterized the more popular counter-decadent representations, together the highbrow artistic condemnation of decadence and the middlebrow character assassination of decadent artists combined to form a strikingly negative image of decadence and the decadent. This particular "fiction" of decadence was dominant in the period, more so than the views of decadence held by its proponents. As decadence emerged as the new form of literary perniciousness in the early 1890s it began to be used as a catch-all term for anything progressive, advanced, shocking or new, leading Hubert Crackanthorpe to declare in response to Arthur Waugh's attack on decadence in the first issue of the *Yellow Book*, "Decadence, decadence: you are all decadent nowadays. Ibsen, Degas, and the New English Art Club; Zola, Oscar Wilde, and the Second Mrs. Tanqueray. Mr. Richard Le Gallienne is hoist with his own petard; even the British playwright has not escaped the taint" (266).

If being decadent had acquired something of a kind *enfant terrible* cachet by 1894 for some, not everyone labelled decadent wanted to be regarded as decadent. This resistance to being described as decadent was particularly true of new women writers and this resistance took on a particular urgency in the aftermath of the Wilde trial which had significant repercussions on those writers and artists associated with literary decadence. It was in this context that Sarah Grand began writing the *Beth Book* (1897) in the summer of 1895, a novel in which she sought to differentiate the new woman and the decadent, two figures of the "new" that were strongly linked in the popular imagination. As Linda Dowling argues,

> [t]o most late Victorians the decadent was new and the New Woman decadent. The origins, tendencies, even the appearance of the New Woman and thedecadent--as portrayed in the popular press and in periodicals--confirmed their near, their unhealthily near relationship. Both inspired reactions ranging from hilarity to disgust and outrage, and both raised as well profound fears for the future of sex, class, and race. To Dowson's apprehensive contemporaries, the figures of the New Woman and the decadent, like the artists who created them and the works in which they appeared, seemed to be dangerous avatars of the "New," and were widely felt to oppose not each other but the values considered essential to the survival of established culture. ("Decadent" 436)

In the context of the Wilde trials, trials which were as much about the perniciousness of modern literary trends as they were about Wilde's sexual practices, the association between new women and decadents was felt more strongly than ever. In the midst of the trials, new women were called by the *Speaker* "creatures of Oscar Wilde's" and Wilde was declared "the father of the whole flock" (qtd. in Stutfield 840). In addition, Grand's 1893 novel the *Heavenly Twins*, a novel that deals in some detail with the subject of syphilis, was strongly implicated in what critics like Thomas Bradfield described as "a stage of decadence" in the history of English fiction, a decadence that Bradfield attributed primarily to fiction by women (543). Grand, who is credited with having coined the term new woman, was even viewed as having started the new woman school of fiction with this book (Spender 83). New women novels like Grand's were castigated along with those of the decadents in the rash of anti-decadent articles that appeared between January and June of 1895 and were deplored for their free treatment of the relations between the sexes and for their interest in the morbid and abnormal. New women novels were more dangerous to some minds because they were vastly more popular than the work of male decadents. Grand's *Heavenly Twins*, for example, sold 20,000 copies and went into six editions in its first year, a remarkable sale for an expensive three-volume novel

(Sutherland 258). Given the strong backlash against new women novelists in the first half of 1895, a backlash that went hand in hand with the backlash against decadence, it is unsurprising that Grand should wish to distinguish the new woman as artist from the decadent male artist. In the context of the Wilde trials, when the reactions provoked by the new woman and the decadent had become predominantly those of disgust and outrage, the necessity of distinguishing between the values of the decadent artist and the values of the new woman artist was more important than ever if the new woman novel was to survive.

(ii) *The Beth Book* and the "Grand" Stand Against Decadence

Like Corelli, Grand was one of the more vocal female critics of decadence in the period, but although both Corelli and Grand were popular writers they differed widely in their social and political views and in their views of the function of art. For her part, Corelli, who was one of those who classed new woman novels and decadent fiction together, would have been appalled to be compared with "New Woman" writer Grand. In *The Sorrows of Satan*, Corelli attacked both these brands of the "new fiction" with equal fervour and declared that new woman fiction was a "loath[some] and "prurient" class of fiction "written by women to degrade their sex" (245). Corelli favoured a literature of spiritual and moral uplift, what she calls an "elevating and purifying" fiction in *The Sorrows of Satan*, whereas Grand imagined art intervening more directly in social problems (29). Grand herself was no fan of Corelli. Commenting to F. H. Fisher (editor of the *Literary World*) on Corelli's self-promoting techniques at the time of the publication of *The Sorrows of Satan*, a book which contained a number of attacks on the literary establishment, Grand remarked: "Marie Corelli seems to be an amusing little person! I never met her, and can't read her works, but hear of her continually in some new pose. I wonder if this last one of injured author will answer. But even if it does, I am not likely to imitate her" (Grand, *Selected Letters* 53).

If Grand did not imitate Corelli in terms of adopting the pose of "injured author" in the press, she was certainly as vocal as Corelli in her condemnation of the French literature and the male literary élite (particularly the aesthetes and decadents for whom she uses the catch-all term the "Stylists") in the *Beth Book*. The *Beth Book*, which was subtitled "Being a Study of the Life of Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure A Woman of

Genius," was one of many novels about women artists and writers in this period--a trend which, as I have suggested, attests to a particularly competitive field in which writers struggled to assert the dominant definition of writer in the wake of substantial changes in the conditions of production. As Teresa Mangum argues, however, Grand's novel stands out from many of these other works in its explicit condemnation of "a literary establishment that made success difficult for a woman writer, particularly one interested in woman's rights" (*Married, Middlebrow* 145).

Adopting the *küntslerroman* form, as Moore had done in *Confessions*, and using the form in a similarly defiant manner, Grand charts the development and formation of the "woman of genius," a development that contrasts sharply with the development of the decadent in Moore's book. If for Moore the decadent artist is formed or created in his rejection of bourgeois life and in his engagement with alternative cultures and literatures, for Grand, whose novel demonstrates women's lack of social freedom and of access to the education and culture that men receive, genius is figured in natural terms. Beth's genius, therefore, argues Mangum, is represented as "intuitive, instinctive, and mystical" and Grand makes a virtue of Beth's lack of schooling by resorting to Romantic conceptions of genius (*Married, Middlebrow* 150).

Mangum makes much of Grand's strategic invocation of the term "genius," noting that Grand plays on its classical, Romantic, and spiritual connotations (*Married, Middlebrow* 150-53). She does not, however, consider the way in which negative connotations circulated around the term "genius" in the 1890s as a result of Césare Lombroso's book *Man of Genius* (1888; English trans. 1891) in which genius, including artistic genius, and criminality were linked. Lombroso's work influenced a number of works linking genius and insanity including Havelock Ellis's book, *The Criminal* (1890), in which he devoted a whole chapter to "Criminal Literature and Art;" J. F. Nisbet's *The Insanity of Genius* (1891); Francis Galton's *Hereditary Genius* (1892); and, Max Nordau's notorious *Degeneration* (1893; English trans. 1895), which was published in an English translation just two months before Wilde was sentenced and which went into several editions over the course of the trials. These works, as I have suggested in my discussion of Corelli, emerging as they did at the same time as literary decadence, played a significant role in the pathologization and criminalization of the decadent artist. Grand was surely thinking of these works when she adopted the term "woman of genius" to apply to Beth, creating a narrative that contests the connection between genius and criminality in the case of her protagonist. Grand, however, contests this connection only insofar as it concerns her protagonist. As far as male artists, decadents in particular, are concerned, Grand's narrative endorses the highly contested links between criminality and male genius. Grand's project, after all, is to distinguish between the new woman and the decadents with whom they were associated, a project which necessitates de-criminalizing and de-pathologizing the new woman, while sustaining the fiction that the decadent artist is criminal and degenerate. Ultimately, Grand wants to insist that "woman of genius" (or new woman) differs significantly from the "man of genius" (or decadent).

Like Corelli before her, Grand, using the discourse of degeneration, excoriates in the strongest of terms, through Dr. Galbraith, the decadent literature of France, maligning the character of the decadent artist at the same time: "If France is to be judged by the tendency of its literature and art at present, one would suppose it to be dominated and doomed to destruction by a gang of lascivious authors and artists who are sapping the manhood of the country and degrading the womanhood by idealising self-indulgence and mean intrigue" (367). Though Beth does gain access to this kind of French literature as part of her literary mentorship, Grand is quick to point out that Beth derives none of her ideas about art from them. For Beth, this literature serves as a purely negative model of what she does not want her writing to be. Characterizing decadents as "vain, hollow, cynical, and dyspeptic" men whose writing appeals to the head but not the heart, Beth forges her own artistic identity in opposition to these writers and their English imitators, the "stylists," represented in the novel in the character of Alfred Cayley Pounce with whom Beth has many discussions about art (374).

Pounce embodies the artistic principles of the decadent artist which are negatively represented in the text. He is a lover and imitator of decadent French literature and a fierce proponent of high literary style. While these qualities are valorized in Moore's representation of his decadent "young man" in *Confessions*, in Grand's novel these qualities take on a negative connotation when contrasted with the ethical and feminist aesthetic of her protagonist Beth. To Beth, Pounce, the decadent, "idealise[s] mean intrigues" and "delight[s] in foul matter if the manner of its presentation [is] an admirable specimen of style" (475). In addition, Pounce scorns the novel with a purpose, a genre he associates with lady novelists, and is antibourgeois in his sentiments (455). For Grand, the decadent aesthetic is guaranteed to make of its proponent a moral and even physical degenerate and in this respect Grand endorses the popular fiction of the decadent as espoused by Wilde's critics and by Corelli, a fiction based on the pseudo-scientific works of Lombroso, Nordau and others. Pounce is a philanderer who tries to get Beth to become his mistress and his physical appearance bears all the signs of his moral degeneration: "an ignoble life had written [lines] prematurely on his face, and his attitude emphasised the attenuation of his body. He looked a poor, peevish, neurotic specimen" (477). Endorsing the view that conservative critics and moralists took during the Wilde trial, Grand makes a direct connection between decadent artistic principles and the decadent lifestyle. Alluding no doubt to the fate of Wilde and some of the French decadents and drawing on the theories of Lombroso, Grand has Ideala (friend of Beth and a character who appears in the first three Grand novels) declare, "[t]he works of art for art's sake, and style for style's sake, end on the shelf much respected, while their authors end in the asylum, the prison, and the premature grave" (460).

Though decadent artistic principles are denigrated harshly in the novel, they are recognized as a dominant force in the literary field, so dominant that Beth herself is influenced by them as she embarks on her writing career. Thus, even as she despises the writing of male artists with its "intellectual ingenuities and Art and Style," she cannot escape from the dominant artistic discourse that prioritizes style over matter as she tries to shape an ethical and feminist aesthetic (376): "From the time she began to think of the style and diction of prose as something to be separately acquired, the spontaneous flow of her thoughts was checked and hampered, and she expended herself in fashioning her tools, as it were, instead of using her tools to fashion her work" (371). Beth, the narrator argues, ignores her "natural faculty," believing that "the more trouble she gave herself the better must be the result" (371). Beth's fault at this point, as the narrative goes on to reveal, is her unquestioning acceptance of the aesthetic dictates of the decadent and aesthetic schools which emphasize manner over matter, schools that she claims to despise and yet whose artistic principles dominate the literary field. The falseness of the aesthetic/decadent view on style is fully revealed through the juxtaposition of Beth and the decadent Pounce.

By the time Beth meets Pounce she has moved beyond her fixation on style to develop a style free of the falseness, artificiality, and imitativeness associated in the narrative, and also in negative representations of decadents, with the decadent stylists:

> Foreign phrases she discarded, and she never attempted to produce an eccentric effect by galvinising obsolete words, rightly discarded for lack of vitality, into a ghastly semblance of life. Her own language, strong and pure, she found a sufficient instrument for her purpose. When the true impulse to write came, her fine ideas about style only hampered her, so she cast them aside, as habitual affectations are cast aside and natural emotions naturally expressed, in moments of deep feeling; and from that time forward she displayed, what had doubtless been coming to her by practice all along, a method and a manner of her own. (423)

For Beth matter is paramount and "if the matter is there in the mind it will out, and the manner will form itself in the effort to produce it" (476). These views contrast sharply with those of Pounce who is completely under the spell of fine style and is shocked at the speed with which Beth writes in comparison with his Flaubertian approach to writing, an approach that Beth had once naively adopted but has abandoned in the course of her artistic development: "[w]hy it takes *me* a week to write five hundred words," he tells Beth. "But then, of course, my work is highly concentrated" he adds, warning her against writing so quickly, "[y]ou can only produce poor thin stuff in that way" (457). "Poor thin stuff" it may be, but, as Beth's friend Ideala points out, it is this "poor stuff" that will be read and loved, works like Thackeray's whom Beth describes as a "Titan" who despite his often "slipshod style" could not have "been a scrap more vital, nor he himself the greater" had he suffered with Flaubertian angst over the intricacies of style (476). Offering an account of her awakening to the false ideals of the stylists, Ideala distinguishes between the work of the decadent stylists whose work is "respected" but not read, and the kind of work Beth is producing, work that will be loved and that will have a direct influence on people's lives (460):

> Then one day a wise old friend of mine took me into a public library; and we spent a long time among the books, looking especially at the ones that had been greatly read, and at the queer marks in them, the emphatic strokes of approval, the notes of admiration, the ohs! of enthusiasm, the ahs! of agreement. At the end of one volume some one had written: "This book has done me good." It was all very touching to me, very human,

> very instructive. I never quite realised before what books might be to people, how they might help them, comfort them, brighten the time for them, and fill them with brave and happy thoughts. But we came at last in our wanderings to one neat shelf of beautiful books, and I began to look at them. There were no marks in them, no signs of wear and tear. The shelf was evidently not popular, yet it contained the books that had been recommended to me as best worth reading by my stylist friends. "There is style for you!" said my friend. Style lasts, you see. Style is engraved upon stone. All the other books about us wear out and perish, but here are your stylists still, as fresh as the day they were bought." "Because nobody reads them!" I exclaimed. (460-61)

Unlike the critics who attacked Wilde's *Dorian Gray* who associated the work of decadents with sensational writing aimed at a popular audience, Grand endorses an alternate fiction of decadence in this passage one which, though meant to undermine the work of the decadent literary élite, corresponds with the decadents' self-representation as martyrs to art. Decadents would not be surprised that their books were not thumbed over by appreciative readers in the public library, nor indeed, given their professed disdain for the reading public, would they wish their works to be taken up in this way. Such admiration by this reading public would only suggest that their writing was crude fodder with no claims to artistic worth.

For Grand, however, as for Corelli who privileged popular success which she viewed as authentic over the false critical success of a corrupted literary field, this popularity with a broader public was a sign of genuine artistic talent. Likewise, Grand questions the value of critical success in a literary field in which criticism is dominated by those like Pounce, "clever young men" who, "having written some little things of no consequence," take it upon themselves "to give [their] opinion, with appalling assurance, of the works of other people, which are of consequence (452). But despite this critique of the male-dominated literary field which does not value women's writing, Grand wants her heroine to achieve success in this literary world, a desire that reveals the ambivalence felt by women writers like Grand and Corelli who claimed to care nothing for critical success among the largely male literary élite but whose narratives often suggest otherwise. Beth even declares at one point that she will only "write for women, not for men," an aim that Dr. Galbraith regards as naive in its generalization of the male readership that Beth thinks is not interested in the "great problems of life" that occupy women (376).

In writing critical success into Beth's narrative, Grand seems to concur with Dr. Galbraith, but the circumstances of Grand's narrative of success for Beth complicate and ironize her protagonist's triumph in the male literary establishment. Beth, we learn in the last chapter of the novel, has "achieved a very respectable success" with her book which she publishes anonymously (517). Even Pounce, who had been anticipating Beth's book and had already written a scurrilous review based on what he thought it would be, published a "highly eulogistic article" in the *Patriarch* before discovering the identity of the author (518). Pounce had, no doubt, been expecting the work to be a novel, but the work, as we are told, "was not a work of fiction at all" (518).

While Mangum argues that this section of the book "provides a dose of feminist humor as well as female victory," I would argue that it is something of a hollow victory (Pounce's eulogistic reception of Beth's book, for one, is highly unrealistic) and is ultimately pessimistic about the place of women writers in the literary field, particularly women writers of fiction (*Married, Middlebrow* 185). Though Beth believes that the novel can be made a vehicle for social protest and that novel-reading need not be a vice, she does not, in the end, write a novel. And while it is significant that Beth achieves success in a work of social theory, the kind of work associated with male intellectuals, does Beth's turn to non-fiction suggest that deep down Grand accepts that aesthetics and ethics are irreconcilable in fiction? Furthermore, though Beth achieves success in the male world of letters, she abandons this literary world for the political platform, further suggesting that women's concerns are better addressed outside fiction. Pykett reads Beth's turn from writing to speaking in the *Beth Book* as an inability "to break free of the discourse of the proper feminine. Within this discourse it proves impossible to write the woman writer. The portrait of the artist as a young woman is replaced by the portrait of the mature woman as public speaker" (*Improper Feminine* 186). The novel also attests to the difficulty of women writers to gain cultural authority and to create their own literary discourse which would combine ethics and aesthetics in contrast to the dominant artistic discourses of the male literary establishment. Women lost in two ways in this establishment. Decadents and other proponents of art-for art's-sake scorned the moralistic and didactic fiction, while more conservative members of the male-dominated literary establishment viewed women writers' frank treatment of social issues as decadent and immoral rather than moral.

The reception of *The Beth Book* illustrates this contradictory view of new women writing and Grand's failure to establish the cultural authority of new women writers over the decadents they were associated with in her representation of the ethical feminist aesthetic of Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure (and, by extension, of Grand herself), "woman of genius." Grand's feminist ethical aesthetic was disparaged in a number of venues from highbrow periodicals like the *Spectator*, the *Athenaeum*, the *Saturday Review*, the *Academy* to more middlebrow periodicals like the *Bookman* and even in feminist women's periodicals like the *Woman's Signal*.[8] The *Spectator* called it a "polemical pamphlet," the *Woman's Signal* declared that "from the moment purpose enters in, the art is destroyed," while "Frank Danby" (i.e. Julia Frankau), the female critic for the *Saturday Review* complained (Grand, *Journalistic Writings* 467, 477):

> apparently she *must* preach her wonderful doctrine of the equality of the sexes, she *must* jumble up medical and moral questions in one inharmonious whole, she *must* ruin her own works of art and deface them, with iconoclastic fervour, by all refuse of the controversies that raged twenty years ago around the dead C. D. [Contagious Disease] Acts. It is a strange and hideous obsession. It is such a simple, elementary obvious truth that any absolutely fine work of art produced by a woman does more toward the convincing of a sceptic world of the equality of the sexes than whole volumes of hysteric shriekings about the imaginary wrongs they suffer at the hands of the sanitarians. (Grand, *Journalistic Writings* 473)[9]

The critic for the *Bookman* and Frank Harris of the *Saturday Review* even suggested that Grand might benefit by reading some of the stylists she rails against in the novel. Harris recommended "a course of Balzac or Flaubert or Maupassant," while the *Bookman* reviewer suggested that "a little of the art and style so obtrusively despised through the mouth of the heroine would have made the journey [of the story] a shorter one" (475). These suggestions incensed Grand who, commenting on Harris's review in particular, wrote to F. H. Fisher,

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[8] The *Woman's Signal* (originally called the *Journal*) was initially an organ of the British Woman's Temperance Association but from 1897 on, when it was under the editorship of Mrs. Florence Fenwick-Miller, the *Signal* gave broader coverage to feminist topics including women's suffrage, domestic violence, education, and women's working conditions. Like Grand and her protagonist Beth, Fenwick-Miller was a suffragist and platform speaker ("The Journal" 2666).

[9] Frankau was a writer, critic, and one-time friend of George Moore. Frankau is known for her novels of Jewish life, considered anti-Semitic, though she herself was Jewish. Frankau's novel *A Babe in Bohemia* (1889) includes a savage portrait of Moore and provoked a great deal of notoriety, earning charges of decadence from critics.

> Mr. Frank Harris can have no sense of humour otherwise would he, in the same paragraph in which he professes that I have outraged his sense of delicacy, have recommended me to study, among others, Guy de Maupassant, author of *Bel Ami*, *Une Vie*, *La Maison Tellier* and other volumes innumerable, with the most indecent passages in them, and all distinguished by immorality unrelieved by a single aspiration towards something more elevating. I should think after a course of Maupassant a student would not know what decency was. (Grand, *Selected Letters* 62)

While Grand, with her belief in using fiction as a vehicle for her doctrines, did not much care about critics who disparaged her artistry, clearly, as her remarks concerning Harris indicate, she was sensitive when it came to discussions of literary decadence, particularly since part of her intention in writing the *Beth Book* had been to denounce precisely the kind of fiction Harris told her she ought to read. But if Harris's comments touched a nerve, she must have been very troubled by the charges of decadence levelled against her given the care she had taken to distinguish the form of art she was endorsing from that of the decadents. The *Academy*, for example, defended its claim that Grand's book was not art by comparing it with the products of the decadents: "to play with nasty subjects, to treat a few vile types as normal products, is not art" (893). Invoking criticisms launched at decadent fiction, the *Spectator* made a similar argument, objecting to the "crude" and "lurid" nature of the novel.

Harshest of all was, once again, Julia Frankau writing as Frank Danby for the *Saturday Review* who began her review with a story about an inmate at an "Asylum for Idiots." In her description of the inmate, Frankau draws on the fiction of the decadent as lunatic, part of the link between insanity and artistic genius being propounded in works like Lombroso's. Frankau describes the inmate with "his brown unkempt hair . . . long beard," his "long and slender and restless" hands, and "his wandering eyes of the lightest shade of blue" which "conveyed an impression of deep-rooted and abiding melancholy"

(Grand, *Journalistic Writings* 469).[10] Frankau goes on to describe the artistic genius of this inmate whose art, though "marvellous," was plagued by his penchant for including lurid images, "lewd suggestion[s]," "abominations," and "revolting details" in his pictures (Grand, *Journalistic Writings* 470, 471). Frankau goes on to say that her purpose in telling this story is "because, in some vague way, Sarah Grand has reminded me again of this unfortunate" (Grand, *Journalistic Writings* 471). In other words, Frankau charges Grand with the kind of lewdness, bad taste, and indecency that other critics directed against artists like Aubrey Beardsley, whose perverse sense of humour in his art recalls the kind of work done by the Frankau's inmate. Furthermore, Grand is aligned with the decadent artists who, according to Ideala, end up in the asylum.

Both as an attempt to divorce the interest of new women from those of the decadents and as a formulation of an ethical feminist aesthetic that challenges the male high art literary discourse, the *Beth Book* clearly failed in the eyes of the literary world. And while Corelli herself had more success in her first engagement with decadence in *Wormwood*, a book that gained her critical praise in highbrow journals, increasingly Corelli's diatribes on art turned the literary establishment against her and she became an object of ridicule even when her targets were equally unpopular with this establishment as the decadents were when she came to write *The Sorrows of Satan*. Even where they were in agreement with the counter-decadents of the male literary élite, women writers who took on the subject of decadence in their work were either branded decadent, as Grand was, or derided for a lack of cultural and artistic sophistication, as Corelli was by reviewers for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Times*. In large part, the critics of the male literary élite, those who shaped a counter-decadent discourse in the press--a more powerful and respected venue than popular fiction--denied women the authority to engage in literary debates by using the same critical venues to mock, denigrate, or undermine the counter-decadent discourse produced by these women in fiction. The attacks on Grand by even women within the field, like Frankau and the reviewer for the feminist *Woman's Signal*, testify powerfully to the dominance of male literary discourses. Ultimately, women writers faced great difficulty in bringing the ethical and the aesthetic into relation, whether they circulated in the realm of the literary élite as Vernon Lee did, or whether they were popular writers like Corelli and Grand. Still, their views of decadence, if derided by the literary community, were integral in shaping ideas about decadence for the broader public and the masses who were more likely to consume the counter-decadent discourse in the form of fiction than they were in the male-dominated élite form of the critical review.

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[10] Frankau's inmate recalls Dowson's description of a madman in his sonnet "To One in Bedlam." Dowson's madman has "delicate, mad hands" and a "rapt gaze" (1, 5). Envious of the wonderful poetic world the madman must be inhabiting, Dowson idealizes him:

> Oh lamentable brother! If those pity thee,
> Am I not fain of all thy lone eyes promise me;
> Half a fool's kingdom, far from men who sow and reap,
> All their day's vanity? Better than mortal flowers,
> Thy moon-kissed roses seem: better than love or sleep,
> The star-crowned solitude of thine oblivious hours! (9-14)

Between the female-dominated fictional counter-decadent discourse and the male-dominated critical counter-decadent discourse, the decadents would find it hard to make a case for themselves either in the public or in the literary field itself. Where women engaging in decadence would find themselves struggling to create a high art aesthetic that addressed their ethical concerns, the decadents would juggle aesthetics and economics as they attempted to bring an élite aesthetic into a field that was increasingly subject to the demands of an expanding popular readership and that, contrary to the views of women writers, was not all that open to expanding the purview of fiction. The decadents' engagements in this process, as I shall demonstrate, would be as fraught as those of the women writers trying to accommodate ethics to aesthetics.

Part 2
Competing Fictions of Decadence
Chapter 3
High Art, Popular Genres I: Decadent Collaborations

I

"Struggling after a New Literary Ideal": Representations of Decadence by the Literary Elite

While male and female counter-decadents were quick to attack decadence as a degenerative influence, some highbrow literary periodicals published elaborate intellectual theories of decadence that emphasized its newness and represented it both as an influential poetic style and as a means of reinvigorating the English novel. Havelock Ellis, for example, saw decadence as a regenerative means of advancing the British novel, a form that he argued was "feebly struggling after a new literary ideal" (60). These views of decadence, however, had a much smaller circulation than the sensationalized popular views. Among the first British periodicals to herald the emergence of an increasingly widespread literary movement known as decadence were the *Pioneer* and the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*. Both of these periodicals catered to a small readership of the literary, artistic, and intellectual élite.[1] Written by Havelock Ellis, Lionel Johnson, and Richard Le Gallienne, the articles in these periodicals focused on decadence specifically as a literary style or a manner of treatment of a subject rather than a lifestyle, an element that was an integral feature of the negative popular and counter-decadent representations.[2] All three articles describe this style in a similar manner, emphasizing the intense focus of the decadent perspective, a focus that is more interested in the part than the whole and, as a result, often presents a distorted picture. Ellis, for example, echoing the definition of French writer and critic Paul Bourget writes the following: "The style of decadence is one in which the unity of the book is decomposed to give place to the independence of the page, in which the page is decomposed to give place to the independence of the phrase, and the phrase to give place to the independence of the word" ("A Note" 52).

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[1] I have not been able to determine circulation figures for the *Pioneer*. Probably, however, the readership was quite select. The *Pioneer* which catered to "progressive" thinkers was published by the Pioneer Club, a club that promoted the discussion of social, philosophical and literary questions (Hall, e-mail to the author). The *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, which had a circulation of about 500, was largely an organ for the Arts and Crafts movement. It appealed to an élite readership interested in Pre-Raphaelitism, medievalism, Aestheticism, the Renaissance, Pater, symbolism, decadence, uranianism, calligraphy, and woodcut. See Ian Fletcher's entry on this magazine in his article "Decadence and the Little Magazines" (179-88).

[2] Ellis's comments on decadence in the *Pioneer* occur in the context of an article on Paul Bourget: "A Note on Paul Bourget" in which he discusses two of Bourget's books on contemporary European writers and one of Bourget's novels. Though Bourget was at this time a proponent of a kind of decadent literary style, he would later become, as Ellis

Of the three articles, Ellis's article is the most pertinent to my discussion of decadent fiction as he deals specifically with the subject of decadence in the novel, whereas Le Gallienne and Johnson discuss poetry. In addition, a later article by Arthur Symons, "The Decadent Movement in Literature" (1893), in the more mainstream *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, is also important in its representation of the views of the literary élite on the importance of decadence to the development of the novel. Both Ellis and Symons regard decadence as the appropriate modern form for a sophisticated civilization. Ellis, for example, described it as the literary expression "of a society which has reached the limits of expansion and maturity" (51). Writing four years later, Symons echoed and elaborated on this sentiment and endorsed the idea of the lack of balance and simplicity in the decadent style: "It reflects all the moods, all the manners, of a sophisticated society; its very artificiality is a way of being true to nature: simplicity, sanity, proportion--the classic qualities--how much do we possess them in our life, our surroundings, that we should look to find them in our literature?" (859).

Like Vernon Lee's argument in "A Dialogue on Novels," Ellis's turns on a comparison of the French and English novel but where Lee found the French novel went too far in its frankness, Ellis praises this frankness, particularly its psychological realism. Where Lee had argued for some form of mediation between the frank brutality of the

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notes, a stridently moralistic "champion of anti-modern reactionism" (*Views and Reviews* 48). Johnson's article "A Note Upon the Practice and Theory of Verse at the Present Time Obtaining in France," published in the April 1891 issue of the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, takes up decadent verse rather than prose. Richard Le Gallienne's comments on decadence, also in the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* of January 1892 and reprinted in *Retrospective Reviews*, occur in the context of a review of Churton Collins's *Illustrations of Tennyson* in which Le Gallienne is anxious to defend Tennyson against Collins's charge that the poet is decadent.

French novel and the puritan reserve of the English novel, Ellis argues that the decadence that is so strong a feature of the French novel will have a salutary effect on the British novel. Expressing his dismay at the sorry state of the contemporary British novel, Ellis cites George Moore as one of the few British writers "possessed of artistic earnestness and consistency" whose novels best exemplify the influence of French decadence (60). But of course by the time Ellis wrote this article, Moore had given up his attempts to bring decadence to the English novel in the face of the strong resistance of the British public and of the restrictive conditions of the publishing industry. By the time Symons came to write his article on decadence, Moore's influence on the development of British decadence had been forgotten. Consequently, Symons cites as his examples of English decadence, Walter Pater for decadent prose and, somewhat curiously, the counter-decadent W. E. Henley for decadent poetry.[3]

Symons's identification, in late 1893, of only Pater as an example of an English decadent prose writer signals, I would argue, the difficulty faced by those among the literary élite in implementing the more avant-garde views of decadence. Pater was successful because, having an income and a profession apart from his writing, he was far more independent of the forces that had constrained a writer like George Moore. So too, while his fiction might be considered decadent in terms of its luxurious style, it hardly challenged the limits of what could be represented in fiction in ways that evoked shock. Most decadents, however, did not have the independence from the field that Pater had and most wanted to go further than Pater in pushing the limits of representation. Chief among the difficulties faced by those among the literary élite who wanted to exploit decadence in the ways described by Ellis and Symons was the fierce resistance to new and foreign literary influences. As Ellis had commented in his essay on Bourget, "English novelists who have been touched by French influence constantly offend by their crude and vulgar extravagance" (59-60).

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[3] Symons's identification of the counter-decadent Henley as a decadent is indeed strange, especially when, as a member of the Rhymers' Club, Symons would have been acquainted with so many poets whose poetry more fully embodied the spirit and aesthetic of decadence. Might it have been a malicious joke on Symons's part? Or did Symons, since he was writing as a proponent of decadence in a mainstream periodical, want to associate bigger name figures with the movement in order to promote it better? This motivation might explain his invocation of Pater who, though understood as decadent by the decadents themselves, was uncomfortable being identified with the more hedonistic elements of the aesthetic being developed by his disciples. Joseph Bristow takes up in some detail the question of Symons's identification of Henley as decadent in his essay "'Sterile Ecstasies': The Perversity of the Decadent Movement" (69-72). He concludes that Symons sees in Henley's poems the same kind of interest in physical sensation as the decadents have and that his poems explore the "tension between poetic representation and physical experience," a tension which exposes the alienation of the poet from the feelings he represents in his poem (72).

This offense was felt even when writers took a middle way by mediating between the French and British novelistic traditions as both Lee's and Wilde's experience in the reception of their works indicates. There was simply no way that the kind of overhauling of the British novel envisaged by Ellis could occur given the historical, social, and cultural conditions that operated in *fin de siècle* Britain. As Ellis argued, "[w]e are not likely to see in England, at present, any successful union of the French and English novel" (59). Successful they may not have been, but attempts were indeed made over the next few years to effect a union between the novel of French decadence and the English novel. The British decadent novel, however, because of the conditions it was subject to would take a different form from its French counterpart--a culturally-specific form.

Though decadents of the literary élite may well have been committed to the decadent artistic principles as laid out by Ellis and Symons, they were, as I have argued throughout this thesis, constrained by various forces. In Part 1, Chapter 2, I have discussed the conflicting positions of the decadents whose desires for fame and money compromised their status as high literary disinterested artists. I have also described the manner in which the conditions of production strongly influenced the form that decadence would take in the British literary context. Moreover, I have considered how these factors--the desire on the part of decadents for fame and money combined with the conditions of production--led decadents to look to contemporary British literary models, quite apart from their French literary models, in order to imagine how to reconcile their high artistic ideals with the demands of the literary marketplace. Finally, I have, in the preceding chapter, described the way in which popular counter-decadent representations were such a powerful force within the British context, overshadowing the more serious discussions of decadence as a means of advancing the British novel that I have just discussed. I am now in a position to discuss the literary productions of those writers committed to decadence.

Even with all this contextualization in mind it might still seem strange to say that the decadents of the literary élite promoted decadence through popular fictional genres. Strange, because decadence has traditionally been understood as avant-garde or as commercially disinterested high art. Strange, too, because one might well ask what is the difference between a popular novelist exploiting decadent themes and a decadent novelist exploring popular media. The difference, it is true, is not always easy to see. It can sometimes seem as though decadent writers are exploiting the popular medium in a similar way as popular writers exploited decadence. And certainly, despite their pose of disinterestedness, decadents were, as I have argued above, trying to make money by their art. Overall, however, the difference between popular and counter-decadent exploitations of decadence and decadent exploitations of the popular centres on the relationship to decadence. Whereas popular and counter-decadent writers are critical of decadence, decadent writers who employ popular genres attempt, often in subtle ways, to promote decadent artistic principles as well as the anti-bourgeois alternative cultural values of the decadent that I have outlined in Part 1, Chapter 1.

In the next two chapters, I will explore the attempts on the part of decadent writers to promote decadent artistic principles and cultural values through the medium of the popular genre. In addition, I will also consider how decadent writers understood the apparently contradictory form of mediation between high and low that they were involved in, both as they attempted to position themselves within the literary field and as they developed their ideas in fiction. Where possible, I will also consider how this decadent fiction was received by the press and how it articulated the apparently contradictory nature of this fiction. I frame my argument around the idea of "collaboration," viewing the decadent intervention in popular genres as a collaboration between high and popular culture. This collaboration, as I will argue, took different forms with different writers and served different ends. Often, the collaborations were uneasy, revealing the tensions and contradictions of the position of the decadent artist within the *fin de siècle* literary field. The first of these chapters focuses on earlier examples of fiction by decadents--Ernest Dowson's and Arthur Moore's *Comedy of*

Masks (1893) and John Davidson's *The North Wall* (1885). The second of these chapters, Part 2, Chapter 4, takes up later decadent fiction by Arthur Machen and M. P. Shiel, fiction whose reception was largely coloured by the by now intense controversy over decadence that dominated the press through the first half of 1895.

II

High/Low Collaboration and the Production of Decadence

(i) Robert Hichens's "The Collaborators": A Model for Decadent Literary Production:

> In collaboration, no man can be a law unto himself. . . . We are both ambitious devils. We are both poor. We are both determined to try a book. Have we more chance of succeeding if we try it together? I believe so. You have the imagination, the grip, the stern power to evolve the story, to make it seem inevitable, to force it step by step on its way. I can lighten that way. I can plant a few flowers . . . on the roadside. And I can, and, what is more, will, check you when you wish to make the story impossibly horrible or fantastic to the verge of the insane. . . . This book, if we write it, has got to be a good book, and yet a book that will bring grist to the mill. (Popular writer Henley to his decadent friend Trenchard in Robert Hichens's, "The Collaborators" 1893)

I begin my discussion of the decadent mediation between high art and popular genres with a discussion of Robert Hichens's story "The Collaborators," a story which was first published in the *Pall Mall Magazine* in 1893 and was subsequently anthologized in a collection of Hichens's short stories entitled *The Folly of Eustace* (1896). The story makes a similar argument to the one made by Vernon Lee in "A Dialogue on Novels," but whereas Lee framed her discussion around a necessity to mediate between the French and English novels, Hichens argues more specifically for a mediation between the high art novel and the popular novel. In its depiction of the problems faced by both popular writers aspiring to artistry and of decadent writers in getting their advanced work published, the story encapsulates many of the issues I have been concerned with so far and proposes a solution to the problems of literary production in the increasingly commercialized *fin de siècle* literary field. In addition, it provides a framework for understanding how decadents conceived of the relationship between high and popular art in their literary productions.

Though largely forgotten today, Hichens was a writer who mediated more successfully perhaps than any other writer between the literary élite and the popular field. Thus, while Hichens may have had less financial and popular success than Corelli, he certainly achieved more critical success and circulated with ease in the world of the literary élite. Though primarily associated with popular fiction, Hichens is largely regarded as an "Artist" within the popular sphere, something of a rich man's Marie Corelli. Richard Bleiler, for example, compares the two writers finding Hichens superior in his ability "to provide vivid and minute descriptions of exotic locales" and more "capable of treating soberly subject matter that in [Corelli's] hands would be sensationalized or vulgarized" (108). Even in the 1890s, the names of Corelli and Hichens were often paired, with Corelli always designated the less talented of the two. But significantly, critics also frequently paired Hichens's name with decadent French writers respected by those among the British literary élite. A reviewer of Hichens's 1897 novel, *Flames*, a decadent mystical story of soul possession, praised Hichens's "Bourget-like felicity" in creating evocative descriptions (N. O. B. 1). He also compares Hichens's fine representations of city life with those of Zola, Huysmans, and Maupassant (N. O. B. 1). Such compliments were rarely conferred on Corelli who was more often than not criticized heartily for her factual errors and stylistic excesses.

In its account of the collaboration between a popular and a decadent writer, "The Collaborators" attests to and serves as a justification for Hichens's unique position within the literary field, a field in which he circulated freely between the élite and popular realms. The "collaborators" of the title are the decadent Trenchard--"excitable," "intense," and "intelligent," a writer of weighty fiction and articles (117, 118, 119), and the popular writer Henley--"full of common-sense," endowed with "a keen sense of humour," a writer for *Punch* and *Fun* and a dramatic critic for a "lively society paper" (119). The story provides all the titillation of the popular representation of the decadent that appealed to a middle class fascinated by the more sensational aspects of the decadent and bohemian lifestyle. For although the story focuses on the collaborative writing project of the two men, the subject of the project (unbeknownst to Henley), is the decadent lifestyle of Trenchard. Trenchard, then, bears all the hallmarks of the popularized decadent, whose bohemian life receives more attention than his literary endeavours. He has an "irregular life," is fascinated with "horrors," has an "immense sense of evil and tragedy and sorrow," and is a morphine addict (118). The subject of the collaborative story--the real story of Trenchard's decadent life—concerns a man's obsessive relationship with a married woman, a morphine addict who drags him down to her level until he too becomes an addict. The relationship culminates in a tragic murder-suicide perpetrated by Trenchard and written into the story just before he proceeds with the act.

But while the story caters to a popular audience in its negative representation of Trenchard's decadence, it also presents an interesting account of the plight of writers in the literary field of the 1890s: both of popular writers who aspire to produce "artistic" works and of decadent writers who want recognition and money and, moreover, to get their work published. The story suggests that "collaboration" between the two kinds of writers is the solution to the problem of literary production given the conditions of the field in the 1890s. Together Trenchard and Henley can produce a novel that is artistic, popular, and financially successful. Trenchard, with his "imagination . . . grip and stern power" will supply the artistic element (120). Henley, on the other hand, with his instinctive knowledge of "what was likely to take and what would be caviare to the general" and his ability to "tincture a book with a popular element [without] spoil[ing] it," will ensure the book's popular success (119). Furthermore, Henley tells Trenchard "I . . . will check you when you wish to make the story impossibly horrible or fantastic to the verge of the insane" (120). Together they intend to write a book that is "powerful, but never morbid; tragic . . . but not without hope" (120-21), the kind of book that Vernon Lee imagined she would write when she wrote *Miss Brown*. They will not "pander . . . to the popular taste," but rather "hit the taste of the day" (121). In effect, they will write a novel that will appeal to all possible reading audiences from highbrow literary types to the popular readership and to points in between, all without sacrificing artistic integrity or profit.

In its representation of the merits of collaboration, the novel serves as validation of writers like Hichens who skirted the divide between high art and popular art. Idealizing both the imaginative power of the decadent writer and the common-sense of the popular writer, Hichens imagines the literary product of the mediation between high and low in positive terms as a "collaboration" rather than as a compromise. As such, it serves to validate Hichens's own cultural authority as a writer who regarded himself both as an "artist" of imaginative power and as one who knew what would appeal to the popular taste. Two of his own novels of the 1890s--*An Imaginative Man* (1895) and *Flames* (1897)--exhibit signs of the kind of collaboration described in his story. They reveal a tension between the "artist" whose imaginative power is fed by his decadent subject matter and the popular writer who, like Henley, is aware of "what is likely to take" and "tincture[s]" his story with "a popular element" (119).

And yet this account of an artist defined in terms of a "collaboration" between artistic/decadent and popular was, as I have suggested, more far-reaching than stereotyped representations of the "great divide" between high art and popular art in the 1890s might suggest. As we shall see, decadence in fiction was, more often than not, presented through the medium of popular genres. For those decadent writers among the literary élite who were trying to advance British fiction but who were obstructed in their aims by a conservative social and literary culture, the popular represented a useful vehicle for promoting high art and the alternative cultural values of decadent writers. In addition, the use of the popular genre made it easier for these writers to get their work published and earn their living by writing.

(ii) A Real-Life Collaboration: Ernest Dowson's and Arthur Moore's *Comedy of Masks*:

The most literal example of a real-life collaboration of the kind imagined by Hichens in his story occurred between Ernest Dowson and his friend Arthur Moore, a relationship in which Dowson was Trenchard to Moore's Henley.[4] While Dowson supplied much of the imaginative inspiration in their collaborations, he relied on Moore to decide whether his schemes were "practicable" or whether they were "too risqué" (Dowson, *Letters* 152). Dowson and Moore collaborated on four novels: *Felix Martyr*, *The Passion of Dr. Ludovicus*, *A Comedy of Masks* (1893), and *Adrian Rome* (1899), of which only the latter two were published.[5] *A Comedy of Masks* brings decadent high art elements to the popular genre of the romantic novel. Dowson and Moore conceived of the novel as a "Besant and Rice pudding" and as a romantic realist novel in the manner of the popular writer W. E. Norris (Dowson, *Letters* 151). Peopling the novel with the stock characters of romantic fiction which Dowson identified as "the self sacrificing lover," "the weak good looking, backboneless, egotistical, shallow successful lover," and the "charming girl" or "jeune fille of a million vaudevilles, loved of the British public," the goal was to produce "pommade" for "the many headed Beast" (*Letters* 151, 152). Their first choice of publisher was Bentley, an established publisher with an impressive list of popular novelists including W. E. Norris, Marie Corelli, Rhoda Broughton, Mrs. Henry Wood, and Maarten Maartens. Bentley rejected the novel, however, and it was eventually published by Heinemann. The novel was quite successful for one of its type by unknown writers, selling out the first edition of five hundred copies in the autumn of 1893 and going into a second edition of one thousand copies in 1894.

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[4] Arthur Moore was not related to George Moore. He was, however, from the prominent Moore family of painters which included his father John C. Moore, landscape and portrait painter, Henry Moore, a member of the Royal Academy, and Albert Moore, a decorative painter and the best-known, in our time, of this artistic family whose paintings *Dreamers* and *Midsummer* have become part of the popular late-Victorian art that is sold in print shops and featured on arty greeting cards. Dowson's collaborator, Arthur, Moore continued to write novels without Dowson but he earned his living as a solicitor.

[5] Mss. for *Felix Martyr* and *The Passion of Dr. Ludovicus* have not been traced and the only information on them is contained in Dowson's letters.

The novel centres on a tragic love triangle between Philip Rainham, "the self sacrificing lover" plagued with consumption, Dick Lightmark, popular artist and villainous "shallow successful lover," and Eve Sylvester, the "charming girl" of typical romantic fiction. Added to the mix are the familiar society matron of fashionable drawing-room novels, the deceived maiden of romantic fiction, and the newly popularized figure of the decadent artist. Certainly many reviewers noted its indistinguishability from the generic popular novel of the time. As the reviewer for the *Critic* harshly remarked, "[t]he story has nothing to recommend it; it is the same old thing told, without spirit, in the same old way" (109). Similarly, the reviewer for the *National Observer* called it a piece of "ephemeral writing" and characterized it as a book full of *clichés* (569). Still other reviewers noted the formulaic nature of the characterizations which made the novel indistinguishable from other mass-produced popular fiction: "The authors . . . have not gone out of their way in search of fresh types or combinations of character" (*Graphic* 54); "Dick Lightmark . . . is perhaps a little too like the ordinary villain of fiction" (*Daily Chronicle* 3). Finally, the novel was described by the reviewer for the *Academy* as having "a strong spiritual affinity" with Beatrice Harraden's melodramatic romantic tragedy *Ships that Pass in the Night*, a best-selling novel of that year that focused on a doomed love affair between two invalids (435).

But while Dowson's and Moore's novel was widely acknowledged as the "pommade" that they had set out to offer the "many headed Beast," it was also regarded as distinctly modern and original by some critics (*Letters* 151). For every critic who saw *A Comedy of Masks* as the ephemeral trash of the circulating library, there was one who regarded it as literature of a more superior make. Thus, the *Pall Mall Gazette* praised what it referred to as a "modern" book: "Every character is a product of our nervous, 'weary,' aesthetic, half-callous, and half-restless age, and they are delicately and vividly drawn. The plot, too, is original, though one fancies that the authors knew their 'Dorian Gray'" (4). Emerging as it did before the tide of "decadent" and "sex fiction" that would inaugurate a vehement attack on decadence in late 1894 and early 1895, the novel was praised for qualities that would later stand for the worst excesses of decadent modern fiction (i.e. the depiction of nervous, "weary", and aesthetic types).

The novel, then, occupied at one and the same time two seemingly contradictory categories and was, at least by critical standards, somewhat more successful at mediating between high and low than Wilde's widely disparaged *Dorian Gray* had been: it was both high art and popular art, combining the psychological analysis of the modern Jamesian novel with the repartee of the typical society or drawing-room novel of popular female novelists like Ouida. As the reviewer for the *Daily Chronicle* noted, the novel's principal storyline combined a "breadth" and "solidity" that made it quite unlike what he referred to as "the vagueness of modern impressionism, and the pettiness of modern realism" (3). And yet, he continued, in its "treatment of subsidiary characters, and of the general background of which they form a part" impressionist and realist techniques contributed to "the delicate emphasis of significant detail; the reticent allusiveness of presentation; the unobtrusive lowness of general tone, giving value and effect to some sudden touch of warmer, brighter colour, which are among the notes of the latest school of contemporary art" (3). For this reviewer, who was generally critical of modern trends in art, the novel succeeded precisely because the more modern impressionist, realist, or decadent elements were made subservient to the more important task of telling a good story. In other words, it was the perfect collaboration of high art and popular elements: it was artistic *and* it had a plot, something the modern novel was often accused of not having by critics like Andrew Lang for whom the modern realist novel was characterized by its "unrelenting exclusion of exciting events and engaging narrative" (688).

This contradictory reception of the novel as both derivative popular trash and innovative modern art appears less strange if we recall Dowson's position within the literary field and the conditions that governed literary production. Though setting out to write a popular novel in order to establish a name as a writer and to garner a sufficient income to live solely by his pen, Dowson was nonetheless influenced by those producers of art admired by the literary élite--writers like Henry James, George Meredith, Emile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, Gustave Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire, and Paul Bourget. Like Havelock Ellis and Arthur Symons, Dowson believed such writers more accurately reflected modernity: "The time for romance, for novels written in the stage method is gone. In a worldly decaying civilization, in an age of nostalgia like the present--what is the meaning of Mr. Rider Haggard? He is an anachronism. It is to books like *Madame Bovary* and de Maupassant's *Une Vie* to books like these one must go to find the true significance of the XIXth century" (Dowson, *Letters* 10).[6]

Thus, although Dowson did indeed wish to write "a study of morbid anatomy in the vein of Paul Bourget," he was all too aware, as his letters indicate, of the conditions of production (*Letters* 33). Acknowledging the prudishness that governed literary publishing, Dowson wonders, for example, if his idea for a "[study of morbid anatomy] would ever go down" and believes "it would require delicate treatment" (*Letters 33*). Similarly, with respect to the literary quality of *A Comedy of Masks*, Dowson acknowledges his capitulation to public taste: "It is not particularly good or particularly original . . . . It will be pommade I am afraid, this novel--but it is that is it not which the many headed Beast demands? . . . [the story is] melo[dramatic] of course & rather violent but the sort of stuff which takes in this country" (*Letters* 151). And yet, as much as he was guided by his desire for fame and economic freedom to produce "pommade," Dowson could not entirely stifle his "artistic" side that yearned to be part of the literary élite. As he worked on the novel, Dowson gradually came to believe that high art and popular art were not necessarily irreconcilable. In June 1890 he wrote to Moore, "I am more taken with the novel than I was at first I must say. And I think conceivably we may work it out in a less pommadish spirit than I feared" (*Letters* 154). By September of that year he was declaring it "a superior production" (*Letters* 167). Dowson's interest in the novel was stimulated by certain artistic elements that he conceived for the novel which reflected his interest in decadence and in the analytic novels of James and of French writers. These elements were, to use a term employed by Dowson, "shaded in" to the "melo" (i.e. melodramatic) plot (*Letters* 151).

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[6] Desmond Flower and Henry Maas, the editors of Dowson's letters, explain the context of these comments (*Letters* 10). The quotation is from notes written by Dowson in his copy of Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm* which he bought in Oxford in 1887. Dowson is responding to the last lines of Schreiner's preface which reads: "Sadly he must squeeze the colour from his brush, and dip it into the *grey pigments* [Dowson's emphasis] around him. He must paint what lies before him." In his note Dowson describes this method as the "greater method" and proceeds with the comments on the novel form that I have quoted above.

Dowson's use of the term "shaded in" provides another metaphor for the relationship between decadent or high art and the popular. For Dowson, "to shade in" meant adding artistic elements to what was otherwise a conventional genre. To this end, he and Moore incorporated minor people and episodes, elements that would give the novel its decadent flavour or, what the *Daily Chronicle* reviewer referred to as, its "*unobtrusive* lowness of general tone" (3; emphasis added). Dowson's term "shading in" also, however, conjures up a number of other ways in which decadent or high art elements relate to the popular genre it imposes itself on. Synonyms for the verb "shade" include "eclipse," "obfuscate," "overshadow," "blacken" and "change by imperceptible degrees into something else" and all of these synonyms hint at the potential distortion effected by decadence on its host genre. That Dowson and Moore did not, according to the *Daily Chronicle* reviewer, let the "lowness of general tone" dominate the story is a testament to the writers' abilities to reconcile the apparently competing discourses of the popular and the decadent in their "collaborative" effort in a manner akin to their fictional counterparts, Hichens's Trenchard and Henley.

This collaboration ensured that the decadent or modern elements in the novel would take a cautious form and would concern the minor action of the plot. These elements are indeed, as the reviewer for the *Daily Chronicle* noted, subservient to the more conventional elements of the main story (3). Impressionistic decadence colours some of the descriptive passages of the novel creating a sombre *fin de siècle* tone. It is also apparent in the episodes which feature Brodonowski's, a restaurant frequented by artists modelled on the kinds of Soho establishments patronised by Dowson and others of the decadent Bohemian set. The main character, Philip Rainham, is an ennui-ridden soul, a kind of *Mike Fletcher* type that would come to typify the decadent morbid type as described at the height of the notoriety of decadent fiction in 1894 and 1895. Most notably and most literally, however, decadence in the novel is embodied in the artist Oswyn, an absinthe-drinking painter whom Lightmark describes as "a virulent fanatic, whose art is the most monstrous thing imaginable" (*Comedy of Masks* 28). As originally conceived by Dowson in June 1890, Oswyn was the stereotypical debauched decadent artist. Dowson described him to Moore as "violent and rather venomous," a "disreputable artistic *genius*, refusing to adapt himself in any way either in art or life to convention: He might eventually die of excessive absinthe drinking & general disgust at the bêtise of a public which boycotts his oeuvre & buys [Lightmark's] pretty little ineptiae" (*Letters* 153). This stereotype was exactly the kind invoked by Marie Corelli in her portrayal of the mad painter Gessonex, friend of the protagonist Beauvais, in *Wormwood* (1890), which she was also working on in the summer of 1890 but which would precede the publication of Dowson's and Moore's work by three years.

But although Dowson's and Moore's depiction of Oswyn takes the stereotype of the decadent as a starting point, they purposely move beyond this conventional representation to a reconsideration of the type. So, in spite of Oswyn's rantings about the tastes of the bourgeoisie and the artists who cater to them, the reader is made to see, through the perceptions of Rainham, that Oswyn is endowed with "nobility," "singleness," and "virtue" (*Comedy of Masks* 33). Thus, paradoxically, it is Oswyn who becomes the hero of the novel as he takes on the responsibilities of fathering Lightmark's rejected love-child and thereby proving that he has strong ethical and moral principles despite his less-than-conventional lifestyle. Under Dowson's and Moore's treatment, then, Oswyn becomes the decadent with a heart of gold. Dowson and Moore further undermine the stereotype decadent by re-envisioning his fate. Oswyn does not, therefore, "die of excessive absinthe drinking & general disgust at the bêtise of a public," in the way that Dowson first conceives (*Letters* 153), factors which weigh heavily in the death of Corelli's absinthe-addicted painter in her more conventional and stereotypical representation of the decadent. Instead, ironically, Oswyn lives to achieve commercial artistic success. His work is displayed in the gallery of a prominent dealer and his paintings sell to the society people that he has so much contempt for. Most importantly, however, Oswyn achieves this success without having to compromise his artistic principles.

In rewarding the artist who is uncompromising in his artistic principles, the novel upholds the alternative cultural values of the artist who is opposed to the dominant bourgeois culture. Of this bourgeois culture, Dowson had had little experience, his own upbringing having been characterized by a decidedly bohemian bent that shaped his world view and makes his sympathetic portrayal of Oswyn understandable. Living off the profits of the family-owned dry dock in Limehouse, Dowson's parents had spent much time abroad and Dowson received no formal education. But if Dowson had ever had any illusions that his life would carry on in the manner in which it had begun, these illusions were soon shattered. Though the Dowsons lived well for some time off the dry dock, the business was hit hard by the shift of the ship-building and repairing industry from the Thames to the Clyde and the Tyne. This drying up of the family income coupled with the increasing illness of Dowson's consumptive parents gave Dowson a keen sense of privation. These factors may have influenced Dowson's decision to leave Oxford and to help his father run the dock while he pursued a literary career in his spare time.

Dowson's position as a once carefree bohemian now forced to earn a living certainly coloured his representations of the artistic life in *A Comedy of Masks*. Thus, although the novel demonstrates sympathy towards the uncompromising artist and his ideals, it also illustrates a certain amount of ambivalence towards these views. Oswyn's rant against the "[*p*]*ompiers*, *fumistes*, makers of respectable *pommade* . . . [with] their thread-paper morality, and their sordid conception of art--a prettiness that would sell" (33)--is greeted by Rainham with a certain amount of impatience, despite his sense of the finer qualities of the artist: "Rainham had heard it all before; it was full of spleen and rancour, unnecessarily violent, and, conceivably, unjust" (33). This section, written by Dowson who was responsible for the bohemian episodes, highlights Dowson's own uneasy position within the literary field. Oswyn's invocation of the term *pommade* is particularly striking given how it recurs in Dowson's letters to Moore during the collaboration on the novel. In these letters, Dowson effectively acknowledges himself as one of those "makers of *pommade*" so loathed by Oswyn (*Comedy of Masks* 33). At times during his production of this pommade, Dowson was disgusted with himself as when he wrote Moore in May 1889: "the evil that is done in perverting and warping one's intellectual vision by vicious & trashy novels, such as 'Dr. Ludovicus' [an earlier Dowson/Moore collaboration] is simply incalculable. For Heaven's sake let us assert our reason & soothe our consciences by writing an antidote--a novel without any love-making in it at all--or with only love making à la Zola" (*Letters* 81).

As he developed enthusiasm for his various excursions into the popular, however, he believed he might produce work "less pommadish" than he had feared (*Letters* 154). Rainham's common-sense reaction to Oswyn's outburst--his sense that Oswyn is "*conceivably* unjust" in his views concerning "the makers of respectable *pommade*" (*Comedy of Masks* 33; emphasis added)--is precisely the reaction of artists like Dowson who must come to terms with the compromises made on behalf of the public in the production of art. And although the following sentences of this passage go on to evoke sympathy for the ranting Oswyn as Rainham comes to recognise his "nobility," "virtue," and "genius," there is also a less explicit plea for the victims of Oswyn's rancour--those towards whom Oswyn might be being "*unnecessarily* violent, and *conceivably*, unjust" (*Comedy of Masks* 33; emphasis added); in other words, those artists like Dowson who appreciated high art as much as Oswyn but compromised out of a need for money or a desire to establish an artistic reputation.

Clearly, Dowson was sensitive about his status as a writer, and the novel, despite its depiction of the world of painters, is also a meditation on the position of artists of all kinds--including writers--in an increasingly commodified society. Thus, at one level, the novel stages an ideological battle between bohemian artistic values and conventional bourgeois values in which bohemian values emerge triumphant with Oswyn the artistic revolté proving morally superior. Ironically, however, this valorization of high art bohemian culture is housed within the *pommadish* popular romantic novel, itself a mark of the compromise made by Dowson and Moore.

Just as Rainham's tempered view of Oswyn undercuts to a degree his heroic status, so too does the ending which rewrites the conventional fate of the absinthe-addicted, bourgeois-hating uncompromising artist. On the one hand, this ending, as I have suggested, exalts the uncompromising artist figure by demonstrating that his bohemian values may be more moral than those of a hypocritical bourgeoisie. And yet, by granting Oswyn success in his lifetime, rather than the more conventional death by absinthe and posthumous fame, Dowson and Moore exact an ironic revenge on Oswyn. One reviewer found this ending unrealistic, saying that "the questionable part of [Oswyn's] presentment is his triumph during his lifetime" (*Academy* 435). Oswyn's success at the end of the novel is, however, the ironic revenge of those "respectable makers of pommade" whom Oswyn has "conceivably" wronged in his censure (*Comedy of Masks* 33). Although Oswyn does not sell out in order to obtain fame, his popularity among a populace he despises forces him to regard his art as a commodity in much the same way as those artists like Dowson who might have preferred to produce high art but were compelled, out of the desire for fame and/or money, to produce pommade.

Once again, this time by demonstrating the discomfort of Oswyn--as he struggles against but eventually accommodates himself to his fame--the novel indirectly appeals for sympathy for the artists like Dowson who felt it necessary to mediate between the claims of the marketplace and the claims of high art. *A Comedy of Masks* was the product of just such a mediation as its origins in the minds of its makers and its ambiguous reception as both a conventional and ultra-"modern" novel in the press both amply demonstrate. But whereas Oswyn might characterize Dowson's and Moore's mediations as a selling out or a compromising of their art for the masses, the writers themselves might have preferred to view their work as what I have been calling a "collaboration" between popular and high art in the production of a novel that Robert Sherard declared "a commercial *and* artistic success" (81; emphasis added).

(iii) Collaboration or Interference?: John Davidson's *North Wall*, a Decadent Romantic Comedy

Another writer who combined the competing discourses of decadence and the popular romantic novel was John Davidson in an early novel *The North Wall* (1885; 1891 as *A Practical Novelist*). But where Dowson and Moore brought decadence to the tragic romantic novel, Davidson brought it to the comic romantic plot. Like Dowson and Moore, Davidson uses the popular genre as a vehicle to reflect on ideas about art and the artist, in this case, the writer specifically. And, as in the case of Dowson and Moore, the novel's popular form ironizes the decadent aesthetic ideology that the novel seemingly endorses. But whereas Dowson and Moore reconcile the decadent and popular discourses by indirectly endorsing the position of the artist who compromises with the public taste in a work that can be viewed as a "collaboration" between the decadent and the popular, for Davidson the decadent and popular exist always in a state of tension in the novel in a way that is probably more suggestive of "interference" than collaboration. In *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, David Weir has described decadence as "an interference of ideas and literary tendencies" in which "the epithet decadence comes to be applied to certain novels for their 'failure' to adhere to the aesthetic dictates of realism or to the conventions of some established genre (such as the historical novel, the naturalistic novel, the portrait novel, and so on)" (13, 15). This idea of "interference" certainly applies in the case of the uneasy nature of the collaboration between high and popular art in Davidson's *North Wall*.

Published in 1885 by Wilson and McCormick, *The North Wall* was priced at one shilling, a price associated with "shilling shockers" and other mass-produced popular and sensational fiction. In addition, an advertising supplement entitled "the North Wall Advertiser" which precedes the text and which contains advertisements for waterproof coats for ladies and gentlemen, an optician, travel guides and maps published by Wilson and McCormick, nerve tonics, corn plasters, and sponges also marks the novel as a commercial artistic production implicated in the consumer-driven literary marketplace. The first lines of the novel challenge its conventional popular form, however, as the protagonist, Maxwell Lee, struggling author, announces that "the novel is played out" and outlines his intention to invent a new artistic form (9). As a writer, Lee stands for the ideals of high art as espoused by the decadents, refusing to compromise his art for profit. He has "composed dramas and philosophical romances which no publisher, nor editor could be got to read" and has most recently "refused scornfully the task of writing 'an ordinary vulgar, sentimental and sensational story'" for a "country weekly" (10). Adopting too, an aestheticist position towards the output of the naturalist school which he declares is "not art," but rather a "mere copying, a bare photographing of life," Lee sets out not to create naturalistic life-like art, but rather to create art in life (11, 10-11): "I am going to create a novel. Practical joking is the new novel in its infancy. . . . the centuries of written fiction must culminate in an age of acted fiction. . . . Novel-writing is effete;

novel creation is about to begin. We shall cause a novel to take place in the world. We shall construct a plot; we shall select a hero; we shall enter his life, and produce the series of events before determined on" (10).

Lee embarks on his "novel creation" by impersonating Henry Chartres, a millionaire whom his brother has kidnapped and who just happens to be a dead ringer for Lee. The very nature of Lee's project implies a collaborative effort. His brother, for example, is an essential part of putting the project in motion. So too, Lee's project is collaborative in that it necessitates the involvement of participants in his "novel creation"--Henry Chartres's family. In reality, however, the project is hardly collaborative. Lee balks at many of his brother's ideas and his other collaborators--the Chartres family--are unwitting participants in his production. Lee is, rather, an interfering force in the lives of the Chartres as he involves himself in the lives of the family in order to create his work of art.

As might be expected, however, "life" in the novel is hardly like real life. The world Lee enters is familiar to the reader as the world of the comic romance with its star-crossed lover and foundling plots. Though Lee does indeed create a new genre of art by interfering in the lives of others in what he terms an act of "novel-creation," he actually does little to interfere with the conventional tropes of novel-writing despite his intentions. Instead, he simply transposes them to a new medium. For example, in a chapter entitled "A 'Heavy' Father," Lee's interfering actions mark him as the conventional "heavy," a type found in melodramatic romances. In addition, Lee's ideas and actions are frequently mediated through the discourse of popular and sensational romances. Thus, in his confrontation with Franklynne, the star-crossed lover whom he has prevented from eloping with his supposed daughter, Lee outlines a number of possible novelistic fates for the young man:

> I don't know exactly what course you should follow. It would be very striking, certainly, if you were to go off and drown yourself at once; but I don't think that you'll do that. For myself I would prefer that you shouldn't. I like you too well, and hope that you will continue to play a part in our story. Perhaps you might take to drink. That's a good idea. Go in for dissipation: there's nothing like it for the cure of romance. Unworldly diseases need worldly remedies. And yet that's too common, especially with lady novelists. (126)

Effectively, then, Lee is trapped within the discourse of the "ordinary vulgar, sentimental, and sensational story" that he scorns to produce for the country weekly, the only difference being that he has created it in life rather than committing it to paper (10). Perhaps understandably then, Lee is dissatisfied with the outcome of his experiment, an outcome that he refers to as "inartistic" and which replicates the ending of the comic romance plot in which the star-crossed lovers are united (145).

As if to compensate for this failure to "interfere" with the conventional tropes of the comic romantic novel, Lee makes an appearance in the final chapter which provides a frame for the action that has preceded it. In this final chapter, entitled "Prefatory," Lee makes one more attempt at interference. In this chapter, we are introduced to the "author" of Lee's adventures, the writer who has taken it upon himself to write up the account since Lee himself is of course interested not in novel-writing but novel-creation.[7] Lee approaches the "author" with a request to "set down" in these pages "a variety of matters which some will be glad to carry with them on their way through the book" (147). These matters, including the conventional descriptions of the hero and heroine, are of interest not to the "imaginative reader," says Lee, but rather to the readers of conventional popular novels--the "proximately experienced reader," the "unimaginative and thoughtless reader," and the "fatuous reader" (147, 148, 151, 152). Included among these readers are businessmen, members of any learned profession, shopkeepers, amateur politicians, matrons, mothers, and unmarried young women (147-150). Ultimately, all of the middle class is implicated in Lee's attack: "I say, whatever flower of that huge, gaudy, ill-flavoured nosegay of a holiday-making many-headed middle-class monster you may be, this chapter is for you" (150). Recalling Dowson's comments on the "many-headed Beast," Lee's pages-long invective is part of the counter-discourse developed by writers aspiring to high art status in a literary field which seemed increasingly to reduce art to the level of the commodity (151). At a more general level, Lee's invective also, of course, points to the decadent's construction of himself outside of his own middle- and professional middle-class origins. This kind of invective owes its origins to Baudelaire's invocation to the "*hypocrite lecteur*" in *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) which was imitated by many *fin de siècle* writers who, as proponents of high art, scorned the artistic tastes of the bourgeoisie. Moore, as I have shown in Part 2, Chapter 1, used this trope in 1888 in *Confessions of a Young Man*, an instance which actually post-dates Davidson's use of it in *The North Wall.*

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[7] This chapter does not appear in the 1891 Ward and Downey edition of the novel. This omission obviously has a significant impact on the effect of the book, making it far more conventional in style.

But if Davidson's novel represents an attack on popular literature and those that read it, it also satirizes, to a certain degree, the pretensions of the aesthetic and decadent positions by exploring the *reductio ad absurdum* of the desire to live life as art. Davidson's exploration of life's imitation of art precedes Wilde's more famous consideration of it in *The Decay of Lying* by four years as do Lee's Wildean quips such as "[t]here is nothing more absurd than reality," "[s]uccess is the only failure, "[a] compassable aim is an inferior one, and "[i]deals cease to be when realized" (*North Wall* 145, 136). In addition, Lee's status as a comic figure within the novel weakens the seriousness of his position as a decadent proponent of high art. Lee's apparent "decadence" is undermined by his inability to escape the discourse of popular fiction in his "novel-creation." Even Lee's "hypocrite lecteur" invective cannot salvage his credibility for it too is undermined by the "author's" deflating comment, "not one of the individuals you have addressed . . . will read this book. Do you think if that were likely I would entertain for a moment the idea of publishing your invective?" (151). Of course, this comment has the effect not only of comically undermining Lee's attack on middle-class readers, but also of asserting the artistic superiority of "the author" at Lee's expense and of reminding the reader that, despite its appearance and pricing, this is a book, not for Lee's addressees, but rather for the few "imaginative readers" that the "author" implies are the readers of his book about Lee's adventures. The "author's" inclusion of Lee's invective, the author implies, makes the book one that won't be read by the middle-class individuals that the invective addresses. Where Lee's interference is unsuccessful, the author implies that his book, though appearing in the guise of a popular fiction, undermines its apparent status and is a book that targets a sophisticated audience.

Ultimately, as many critics argue of Davidson's work in general, it is difficult to determine the object of Davidson's satire. How does Davidson understand the relationship between high and popular art and how does decadence come into the equation? In many respects, *The North Wall* attests to Davidson's own highly ambiguous feelings about his position within the literary field. We have seen, in Dowson's case, how the compromises he made for the literary market necessitated a kind of distancing from the extreme position within the artistic field occupied by his fictional creation Oswyn in *A Comedy of Masks*. This distancing resulted in an affirmation of the artist who engages with the marketplace in a reasonable if cautious manner. But where Dowson's and Moore's reaction to the contradictory demands of art and the marketplace resulted in a "collaborative" novel that reconciled these demands, Davidson's reaction to the contradictory pulls of art and the marketplace resulted in work that emphasized the tensions of his position as a writer, his feeling that his economic need which involved him in hack writing "interfered" with his high artistic aims.

As a writer, Davidson's attitudes reflected those of the aesthetes and decadents who rejected middle-class values and insisted on the autonomy of art. Like other decadents, Davidson believed that true art (in his case poetry), as he wrote to Edmund Gosse in 1900, "will appeal genuinely only to half a hundred people in a generation" (qtd. in Townsend 379). Furthermore, as he wrote John Lane that same year, he desperately wanted to pursue literature as "an art and not as a livelihood" (*Selected Poems* 192). But his reaction against his father's stern Scottish evangelicalism also made him suspicious of anything that bred in its followers a fervent devotion, hence his scepticism of the aesthetes' and decadents' worshipping of the "religion of art." This scepticism, already evident in his 1885 novel, *The North Wall*, became even more apparent in the 1890s. Though he was associated with the Rhymers' Club, a club whose individual members were responsible for a considerable amount of "decadent" poetry, Davidson, who was older than most of the club's members, felt like an outsider among these young poets. As Ernest Rhys (member of the Rhymers') recalled, Davidson "refused to become an out-and-out member, saying he did not care to be ranked as one of a coterie" (qtd. in Townsend 141). In addition, as a married man with two children, Davidson was far more dependent on, and consequently more bitter about, the kind of hack reviewing and writing that it was necessary to engage in for those trying to make their way within the literary field. These family ties made it less possible for Davidson to occupy what Bourdieu calls the "most adventurous" and "riskiest" positions within the literary field--the "exposed outposts of the avant-garde" that were desirable to Davidson and his peers (Bourdieu, *Rules* 259, 260).

Davidson, then, felt like an outsider. Neither a writer of the popular variety nor very comfortable among the literary élite, Davidson displayed bitterness and contempt for both poles of the field, hence the difficulty in determining the object of his satire. Ultimately and ironically, Davidson's ambivalence towards decadence was coloured by his dawning sense of its inextricable link to the popular and its sham status as high art, at least within the context of the British literary field of the 1890s where decadence was associated with John Lane and his circle of writers. The Bodley Head must at first have seemed a godsend to Davidson who was tired of reviewing and "devilling." The Bodley Head was known to make poetry pay and in 1892 Davidson was pleased to be publishing with them. But by 1894, Davidson had grown disenchanted with Lane and his circle and, in a letter to a friend whom he admired as a true artist, Davidson referred to the London literary élite as "those new women who wear their sex on their sleeves . . . and . . . those new men who are sexless--very pleasant abominations of the time. (*Selected Poems* 182). Davidson's experiences among what he regarded as a sham literary avant-garde may indeed have coloured his views of his own early literary productions, particularly his novels which, like the productions of the Bodley Head that I will discuss in the next chapter, mediate between the claims of high art and the marketplace in ways that Davidson would come to regret. In years to come, as Davidson devoted himself to his difficult "Testaments," he would repudiate nearly all his early works, describing them as books that appeal to "average minds" because "there is just a little genius in [them]: [average minds] feel it, they can see it: it is only a rung or two above them on the ladder" (qtd. in Townsend 374).

Davidson's evident disgust with the Bodley Head and the *Yellow Book* as sites of fashionable bourgeois rather than genuine literary avant-gardism corroborates much recent criticism which has explored the strategies employed by Lane in selling high art to the middle classes, an issue which I have treated in my discussion of publishing venues for decadence in Part 1, Chapter 2. Given Lane's approach to the publishing of decadence, it is hardly surprising that decadence took the form it did--a mediation between the high and the popular. Though, as the examples of Dowson and Moore and of Davidson indicate, decadence had taken this form before Lane came along, the high-profile nature of Lane's enterprise, far outshone these earlier productions and formalized this process of mediation. As R. D. Brown argues, "without Lane's publishing ventures, the movement known as Decadence would not have taken the form it did" (39). Though Brown does not examine Lane's shaping of decadence in terms of a mediation between the high artistic and the popular, it is clear that this element helped shape his understanding of his publications. It makes sense then to turn now to these publications in order to see just how the "collaboration" between the high and the popular worked itself out in decadent publications which emerged from the most famous venue of decadent fiction--the Bodley Head.

Part 2

Competing Fictions of Decadence

Chapter 4

High Art, Popular Genres II: Collaborations in the "Sodley Bed" of Decadence or, Decadence and the Bodley Head

Whereas the introduction of a decadent discourse into popular genres had provoked no remarkable instances of critical outrage in the cases of John Davidson's *North Wall* or Ernest Dowson's and Arthur Moore's *Comedy of Masks*, this same combination elicited virulent attacks by late 1894. Something had happened between the publication of Dowson's and Moore's novel at the end of 1893 and the emergence of an aggressive counter-decadent discourse in the early months of 1895 that brought decadence into the spotlight. That something was, I would argue, the launching of the Keynotes series and the *Yellow Book*, both of which issued from the Bodley Head of John Lane in 1894. Despite Davidson's dislike of the Bodley Head/*Yellow Book* coterie that centred around Lane, it was Lane who was largely responsible for supporting the work of many of the new unknowns who were interested, not in becoming the next Marie Corelli or Rider Haggard, but who wanted to establish themselves among the intellectual literary élite.

Though, as I have suggested throughout this study, decadence had been explored in the late 1880s and early 1890s in a wide variety of fiction and periodicals, it was really through the efforts of publisher John Lane that decadence found its most highly visible "public forum" in the year 1894 (R. D. Brown 39). While neither Bodley Head books nor the *Yellow Book* ever achieved sales figures nearing those of large commercial publishers and popular periodicals, the notoriety surrounding them garnered them much attention in the popular press. *Punch*, for example, continually satirized Bodley Head books, the *Yellow Book* and the new women and decadent writers associated with these publications ensuring that, even if one had not read a Bodley Head book, one knew something of what they were like. 1894 was a banner year for such parodies in *Punch* for it was in this year, as R. K. R. Thornton notes, that the largest number of references to decadence appeared (*Decadent* 43). Other periodicals were equally interested in this apparently new phenomenon as decadence superseded other literary controversies as the focus of attention and as the Bodley Head and the *Yellow Book* became synonymous with decadence.

The emergence of an increasingly vehement reaction against decadence in late 1894 and early 1895, then, was largely prompted by the establishment of a publishing enterprise that seemed wholly designed to promote decadence--the "Sodley Bed" of decadence, to use a phrase coined by Aubrey Beardsley (Beardsley 148). Decadence, then, no longer seemed to be a matter of an isolated text here and there; rather, to many, it seemed to be the whole aim of Lane's *Yellow Book* and his Keynotes series. In addition, the perceived popularity of the Bodley Head seemed to promise a host of imitators in what would amount to a large-scale degradation of literature. It was precisely this perceived popularity that distressed critics of decadence. If the work of the Bodley Head writers had been seen as catering to a small intellectual élite it might not have caused so much consternation. But, as in the case of the Vizetelly Zola translations, this fiction, now described as decadent rather than pernicious, seemed to many critics to be catering to a wide popular audience and this impression must in part have been created by these writers' use of popular forms and genres. Thus, despite the fact that those who were among what one Bodley Head writer called the "brilliant and amusing circle" that centred around Lane liked to think of themselves as part of a literary avant-garde, the ambivalent character of their work contradicted this status (Sharp 56).

I

Making Progress against Decadence: Perfecting the Counter-Decadent Discourse

Before going on to discuss how popular and high art converge in some examples of decadent Bodley Head fiction and how these books were received by an increasingly anti-decadent press, I will examine the main claims of the central journalistic attacks on decadence from the first half of 1895. Though I have already given some idea of how the decadents were viewed by their opponents and of how the formation of a counter-decadent discourse developed in the late 1880s and early 1890s in earlier chapters of this thesis, I now want to illustrate how far this discourse had developed by early 1895. The assumptions made in contemporary attacks against decadence often, as I have suggested, ran counter to the received notions of decadence as they have come down to us in literary history. For whereas in literary history, decadence has been characterized variously as avant-garde, anti-democratic, élitist, aristocratic, misogynistic, and as high art radically opposed to popular art, the contemporary criticism sees decadence as an art form that is popular, that appeals to women and a general audience, and that is socialist, even anarchistic in tendency.

In part, the contemporary critics' views of decadence were coloured by their own desire to undermine what they saw as a dangerous literary tendency. What better way to take decadence down then to undermine its status as high art by linking it with women and the working classes? And yet, at the same time, there is no doubt that their views were also based on fact. Decadent texts, as I have been trying to show, did indeed combine the discourse of popular art with the discourses of high art and this disturbed critics at a time when issues of access were of paramount concern in literary debates. For critics of decadence, the mediations between high art and the popular practiced by the decadents were not only hypocritical, they were also dangerous. For these critics the blurring of the boundaries between popular and high art threatened to blur important social distinctions as well.

The identification of decadent fiction with the popular was a central feature of the attacks on decadence in the first half of 1895. Thus, despite the antipathy with which the decadents viewed a popular press that catered to the masses and contributed to the lowering of the standards of fiction, their work was seen not only as a product of this press but also as fiction which catered to the popular press's mass audience.[1] In his June 1895 article "The Gospel of Intensity," for example, Harry Quilter located the origins of decadence in "sensational journalism" which, since its inception, "has become almost daily more unscrupulous and more irresponsible" (774). "Is it not," he asked, "most natural that the writers of fiction and poetry should follow in their accounts of imaginary life the system which their journalistic comrades daily prove to them to be the most popular?" (774). In "The Fiction of Sexuality" which appeared in the *Contemporary Review* in April 1895, James Ashcroft Noble similarly argued that decadent fiction catered to a mass audience: "I believe . . . there is . . . abundant evidence in favour of the view that the greater number of [decadent] books are . . . the outcome of a deliberate intention to win notoriety and its cash accompaniment by an appeal to the sensual instincts of the baser or vulgarer portion of the reading public" ("Fiction of Sexuality" 490-91). In a related vein, Hugh E. M. Stutfield worried about the "*enormous* sale of hysterical and disgusting books" (834; emphasis added). The suspicion that these books were massively popular and that the artists' exploration of the abnormal and the morbid was prompted more by an interest in monetary profit than it was by an interest in the promotion of "high art" was practically a critical commonplace and was endorsed in a number of other venues.[2] J. A. Spender, for example, spoke of "the market value which attaches to an outrage on good taste" in his attack on decadence in the *Westminster Gazette*, while a writer for the *Whitehall Review* declared that the "appearance [of the vicious . . . or impure side of life] in a superlative degree of naseousness . . . act[s] as a bold advertisement to the book, so that money may be made out of it" ("New Fiction" 105; "Morbid" 13).

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[1] Similar charges were laid against naturalism by W. S. Lilly in 1885. See Lyn Pykett's "Representing the Real" 172-73.

Far from being considered avant-garde then, these decadent texts were seen as fodder for the masses as well as more particular readerships within the mass. One of these readerships was women, a readership that had been associated with popular and low fiction throughout the literary debates of the 1880s and 1890s. This association of the decadent text with the female reader was as ironic as the association of decadence with the popular press for the mostly male literary élite despised the popular press and the female readership with equal fervour. The distaste, for example, that George Moore expressed for female readers in *Literature at Nurse or Circulating Morals* was one shared by many of the aspiring male writers of the 1890s. Arthur Machen, for example, complaining in his autobiography of the low standards of journalistic writing, argued that papers like the *Globe* and the *St. James's Gazette* "were meant to please the educated," while papers like the *Evening Standard* "are designed to entertain the uneducated, and the uneducated may be equated, very largely indeed, with women" (*Thing Near and Far* 126). Similarly, M. P. Shiel castigates women readers in "On Reading": "you read without knowing how to read; if you read only the best you still read too much; because nearly all that you read is nearly as bad as bad can be, unnovel 'novels' of feeble people" like Marie Corelli and Rita (14, 16, 17). Despite the antipathy with which these writers held women readers generally, both Noble and Stutfield target women as the primary consumers of decadent fiction with Noble describing them as "neurotic young women of the idle classes" ("Fiction" 498). Women writers also figure as significant producers of this "low, loathsome, and vulgar" decadent fiction in the Stutfield article and in the *Whitehall Review* article despite the fact that, as I have argued in Part 2, Chapter 2, women writers were almost unanimous in their criticism of decadence ("Morbid and Unclean Literature" 13).

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[2] The belief that these books were massively popular was false if we compare the sale of these books with the truly popular novels of the period. One of the best-selling of the books condemned in the attack on decadent fiction was Egerton's *Keynotes*, a book which sold a little over 6000 copies (Nelson, *The Early Nineties* 323). This is a paltry number if we compare it to the 50,000 in sales that constituted a "best-seller" of the period (Keating 424). Though there were very few authors who reached this level, the sales of Bodley Head publications were still well below the 10,000 achieved by many popular writers of the time (Keating 424).

An equally strange pairing in the main critical attacks on decadence in early 1895 is the association of decadent fiction with the working classes. Partly, this accusation must have developed from the recognition of the interest of decadents in working-class cultural institutions like the music hall, that I have discussed in Part 1, Chapter 1. Despite the fact that there is no evidence of working-class interest in decadent fiction, critics of decadence believed the working class was reading this fiction, a fiction that seemed to them to promote working-class culture. As Linda Dowling points out, decadents were often accused of "Cockney impudence" and "[c]ritics of the avant-garde were convinced that this 'Cockney' emphasis on sensation and cheap self-culture . . . would not only sap the moral sense of individuals but would undermine the distinctions of class" ("The Decadent" 443-44). I have demonstrated how this accusation functioned even before decadence had fully emerged in my discussion of Robert Buchanan's attack on Moore in "The Young Man as Critic," an article that figured Moore as "'Arry triumphant, the tongue loosened, the morals and manners free and easy, the old gods of letters set up for cockshies, the music-hall turned into a temple of all the arts, and 'Arriet, *alma Venus* of Seven Dials, *hominum divumque voluptas*, at her apotheosis" (371-72). This class discourse continued to be used as ideas about decadence were more fully articulated in the mid 1890s. Thus, despite the highly anti-democratic sentiments that characterized many of the writers associated with decadence, their work was aligned with socialist, communist, and anarchist political movements. Stutfield, for example, noting the common characteristics of the "aesthetic sensualist and the communist," declared "[b]oth have a common hatred of and contempt for whatever is established or held sacred by the majority, and both have a common parentage in exaggerated emotionalism" (841).

The fear that such literature threatened to "poison the springs of national life," a fear exacerbated by the publication of the English translation of Nordau's *Degeneration* in early 1895, was a central concern of the counter-decadent discourse of 1894 and 1895 (Stutfield 843). Moreover, it was a fear prompted by the belief that what those among the literary élite characterized as "high art," was actually popular fiction that had widespread circulation. As Spender remarked, "'The Philistine' [i.e. Spender] observes . . . that writing which seems to him to be indecent is almost invariably declared to be art, while that from which the element of indecency is absent is apt to be dismissed as indifferent hack-work" (105). And if, as Spender argued, indecency was known by these writers to have a high market value than the work's status as high art was surely undermined in the context of a literary field in which economic profit and artistic merit were regarded as incommensurable.

The furore over decadence might not have been nearly as fierce nor even existed at all if the decadents' claim to be writing for the select few, the literary élite, had been taken at face value. After all, Zola's status as a pernicious influence had been practically eradicated once the production of cheap English editions was put to an end by the imprisonment of Vizetelly. Zola was received warmly on his 1893 visit to London and ultimately sought refuge in England during the Dreyfus affair. In addition, the unexpurgated Lutetian Society editions of Zola issued in 1894-95 raised no anxieties among critics, even in the midst of a renewed attack on perniciousness, because their high price put them beyond the reach of the general public who might be endangered by them. At issue in the Vizetelly/Zola publications and the so-called "decadent" publications was a concern about access. Indeed, access, as Lyn Pykett has argued, was a central issue in all the main literary debates of the 1880s and 1890s ("Representing the Real" 175). Decadence, then, became a source of anxiety because it seemed, from the point of view of its critics, to be widely accessible to a popular readership, especially women and the young. This perception was fed, I would argue, by the ambivalent nature of the decadent text which, to use just a few of the descriptors applied to this work then and now, embodied "modern," "avant-garde", "advanced," "progressive," "morbid," "abnormal," "decadent," and "artistic" ideas in a *popular* form or genre.

The ambivalence of these texts and consequently of these authors and the suspicion with which they were regarded by their critics explains the emphasis on hypocrisy in much of the anti-decadent discourse. Words like affectation, eccentric, artificial and pose/*poseur* were frequently used to denounce the works or writers of what were regarded as decadent texts. These words carried particular resonance in the midst of the trials of Oscar Wilde, the most prolific of 1890s decadents and one whose works notoriously endorsed these qualities as in the following epigrams from "Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young": "The first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible. What the second duty is no one has yet discovered."; "In all unimportant matters, style, not sincerity, is the essential. In all important matters, style, not sincerity, is the essential" (*Complete Works* 1205). In the pre-postmodern context and with the Wilde trials as a backdrop, affectation and posing became cardinal sins to be avoided by the serious *litterateur*. And though most of the decadents I have been discussing took themselves more seriously than Wilde and Max Beerbohm who both engaged, in a playful manner, with posing and masks, critics tarred them with the same feather. As one counter-decadent pointed out, the best way to put an end to decadence was "to make it ridiculous" (Noble, "Fiction" 491).

Making decadence ridiculous was precisely what the *National Observer* had in mind when it attacked the imposture of decadents in "The Damnation of Decadence" in February 1895 and in "The *Pose* of Artist" in April 1895. In the first article, entitled "The Damnation of Decadence," the writer vociferously attacks the decadents, accusing them of a convoluted array of hypocrisies:

> And what are these who now howl and whine and write their sickly stuff about *décadence*, and pretend to gird at *décadence*, hoping all the while to gain the glory of being classed themselves among the *décadents*, whom, with their puling whimper, they pretend to decry? . . . Such creatures are the most despicable excresences that can grow upon literature. They have not the daring for immorality, and they hug themselves upon being above or beneath morality. . . . They make their miserable attempts at a vile and cowardly prurience and might blush to find themselves known for what they are, had they an ordinary honest blush left among them. (390-91)

In exposing the various hypocrisies of the decadent, the writer of the article does not suggest that the decadent's imposture is part of a grab for sales. Nonetheless, the confused image of the decadent in many ways results from the complex positioning of these writers within the literary field. Decadence was fashionable but only within certain limits. Fashionable too, with the emerging interest in lives of writers and a press willing to report on these lives, were writers. Cultivating an artistic persona, then, something that Wilde was a master at, was also an important part of establishing artistic legitimacy. For those among the literary élite, anxious to distinguish themselves from both the commercial writer and the emerging "professional" writer, the dilettante, bohemian and decadent were popular models. The fashionability of things that stand inherently against the popular put writers in a bind, the bind that is unsympathetically described in the *National Observer* article. Writers mediated cautiously between the high literary and the popular and the moral and the immoral both in the production of their work and in the construction of their identities. From their point of view, this caution was necessary to advance fiction, to modernize it through stylistic experimentation and by extending its purview. To their enemies, on the other hand, this mediation smacked of hypocrisy.

II

High/Low Collaborations and the Production of Bodley Head Decadence

(i) A Horrific Collaboration: Arthur Machen's *Great God Pan* and Decadent Pan(ic):

Given the important role the Bodley Head played in bringing decadence to the attention of the general public, it is not surprising that the *Yellow Book* and the books of the Keynotes series figure so prominently in the critical attacks on decadence in early 1895. The writer of "The Damnation of Decadence," for example, invokes both the *Yellow Book* and a "work of fiction lately published, the proper place for which would be a jar of spirits in a strictly scientific museum" in his vitriolic attack (390). This latter work was undoubtedly Arthur Machen's *Great God Pan and the Inmost Light*, a work that was described in very similar terms in reviews and that was also a focus of attention in both Spender's "New Fiction" and in Quilter's "Gospel of Intensity." *The Great God Pan*, number five of the Keynotes series, was published in December 1894 when the controversy over literary decadence was beginning to heat up in the press. Though *The Great God Pan* had been completed as early as 1891, it had been rejected by at least one publishing firm-- Blackwood's which had "shr[unk] from its central idea"--before being taken up by the enterprising Lane (Machen, Introduction xix). Similarly, the accompanying tale, *The Inmost Light*, after having been commissioned by Mary Elizabeth Braddon--perhaps for inclusion in *Belgravia* the periodical she edited--was ultimately rejected. The book was one of the more successful of the Keynotes series, going into a second edition in February 1895 and sparking a number of parodies including Arthur Compton-Rickett's "A Yellow Creeper" and Arthur Sykes's "The Great Pan-Demon: An Unspeakable Story."

The book consists of two tales both premised on medical experiments gone awry. In the first of the two, "The Great God Pan," Dr. Raymond's interest in "seeing the god Pan" or "lifting the veil" to see the world beyond results in a brain operation on a young woman (3). She becomes a "hopeless idiot" as a result of the operation, but gives birth to a she-devil--the offspring of the god Pan, a *femme fatale* who leads men to their deaths by exposing them to unnamed horrors (16). The second story, "The Inmost Light," deals similarly with a doctor interested in the esoteric and arcane who performs an experiment upon his wife, an experiment which likewise results in the creation of a species of she-devil. In both the stories, however, the gothic Faustian over-reacher plot is modernized by the emphasis on modern London and through the inclusion of the dandified and dilettantish young men that had come to be associated with decadence from the late 1880s in works such as Moore's *Confessions* and *Mike Fletcher* and in Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Like *A Comedy of Masks* and *The North Wall*, *The Great God Pan* bears all the signs of its writer's attempt to establish himself in the literary field through a mediation or a collaboration between the popular and the "artistic." Though later in his career Machen would insist on his arch-purist principles, stating in his 1923 memoirs that his writing was always "entirely divorced from all commercial considerations" and that he "wrote purely to please [him]self," his early works belie this claim (*Things Near* 96). Machen's belated representation of himself as an uncompromising writer may well have been coloured by his perceived failure to make his mark in literature, a failure attested to by his claim that he made only £635 out of eighteen books over a period of forty-two years (*Things Near* 55). By the contradictory logic of the field of cultural production, Machen's economic failure can be translated into the symbolic capital of artistic success for a writer aiming to emphasize his artistic martyrdom.[3] While Machen may indeed have become more uncompromising as his career progressed, his position in the 1890s resembled that of so many of the young writers aspiring to rank among the literary élite but forced to engage in money-making work.

Machen came to London from Wales in the 1880s to pursue a career in journalism, a career path that, as Davidson noted gloomily in an article in the *Speaker* in May 1891, attracted so many young writers: "the ever-increasing numbers, ambitious of literary distinction, who flock to London yearly, to become hacks and journalists, regard the work by which they gain a livelihood as a mere industry, a stepping-stone to higher things--alas! a stepping-stone on which the great majority have to maintain a precarious footing all their lives" (583). Instead, in the years from 1880 to 1890 Machen tutored children, worked for George Redway and Robson and Kerslake--publishers on the fringes of the literary field--made youthful attempts at developing himself as a poet in the style of Swinburne, translated esoteric works, and read voraciously. In addition, Machen had two of his own works published--*The Anatomy of Tobacco* and the Rabelaisian *Chronicle of Clemendy*, both of which were at least partially financed by Machen himself. Though Machen was a published author by 1890, his books, written in an antiquarian style and dealing with subjects of specialist interest, were hardly destined to make him a figure of importance in the literary field, nor were they particularly remunerative. As Machen's most recent biographer Mark Valentine notes, even the popularity of medievalism among late-Victorians did not attract readers to the *Chronicle of Clemendy*. Machen's medievalism, he argues, was not the fashionable drawing-room medievalism of aestheticism but rather an earthy one (17).

Machen must have had some growing realisation that he would not make his mark in the literary world if he continued producing such esoteric work for in 1890 he seems to have determined to pursue a more commercial literary path as he abandoned his antiquarian style to "write in the modern manner" (Gekle 43). From this point on, Machen's stories began appearing in the *Globe* and in the *St. James's Gazette*. In addition, Machen began to try to cultivate relationships with those of the literary élite, Oscar Wilde in particular.[4] Ever the iconoclast, though, Machen also delighted in shocking those of the literary élite as when he told Henry Harland (editor of the *Yellow Book*) that he admired Conan Doyle's *Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*. Machen suspected that this demonstration of his lowbrow literary tastes was the reason Harland never asked him to contribute to the *Yellow Book* (Gawsworth 162). Though Machen did, as he himself admitted, write the occasional "society" tale, more often than not Machen drew on the esoteric and arcane knowledges that constituted his own interests and that he had cultivated as a cataloguer of occult books for George Redway (Machen, Introduction xvii). Machen simply put this knowledge into a more accessible and popular form. Despite his claims, then, that commercial considerations never entered his mind, Machen's *Great God Pan* bears all the signs of the compromises characteristic of the writer mediating between the claims of art and the claims of the marketplace in a product that represents the "collaboration" of high and popular art.

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[3] This contradictory logic worked particularly well for Machen in 1923 when he published the memoirs because Machen was in the midst of experiencing a minor vogue. Secker and Knopf republished a number of Machen's works and he was garnering attention from a number of high-profile literary types in the U. S. particularly. This élite fan base implied that Machen's economic failure must be read as proof of artistic

The Great God Pan's claims to "high art" lie in its treatment of the arcane and

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martyrdom rather than the undesirable alternative: i.e. that Machen was, purely and simply, a bad writer.

[4] In his introduction to the 1916 edition of *The Great God Pan*, Machen makes his meeting with Wilde seem accidental: "I chanced to meet Oscar Wilde, and dined with him" (xvi). In his recollections to Munson Havens in a letter from January 1, 1925, however, Machen's intentions suggest greater calculation on his part:

> I met Oscar in an odd way. In the year 1890 he published "The Picture of Dorian Grey [sic]" in Lippincott's magazine. I read the tale & was a good deal impressed by it; though I did not think then & I do not think now that it was a masterpiece. Well, shortly before this;[sic] I had issued my version of *Le moyen de Parvenir* under the title of *Fantastic Tales*. I had quite forgotten how it was, but some phrase or sentence in Wilde's book led me to suppose that he would be interested in Beroalde de Verville & I accordingly sent him a copy of my translation with a brief note. I received an extremely polite letter in reply suggesting that we ought to meet; & the result was that Wilde dined with me one night at the Florence, "the queer little Italian restaurant in 'Rupert Street' of 'Dorian Grey' [sic]. (Machen, *A Few Letters* 29)

perverse subject matter of what J. A. Spender termed the "new fiction" and its concern with elements of literary style. Certainly in its physical appearance *The Great God Pan* resembled books of a high literary and *bellettristic* character. At least one reviewer made special note of the volume's "striking covers, the beautiful title-page especially, the fine paper, and the handsome type" which to him "all point[ed] to the perfection of taste in the art of book production" (*Daily Free Press* 2).[5] This praise of the book's appearance coupled with the reviewer's admiration for the "artistic" nature of the tale combined to present a "highbrow" image of the work (2). The book also appealed to Machen's peers among the young literary élite. Richard Le Gallienne praised the work highly and George Egerton, though she disliked the theme and content of the work, admired the style so much that she believed that "for its writing alone the *Great God Pan* was undeniably worth publishing" (Gawsworth 150). Other critics were not as impressed with Machen's pretensions to style. While a certain indebtedness to the practitioners of literary decadence in France may have impressed those Francophilic members of the literary élite, for critics like J. A. Spender the influence of what he called the "French school of diabolists" and sex maniacs was pernicious (99, 101).

The book also, as I have suggested, celebrated the "decadent young man" that Moore had introduced to the world in *Confessions of a Young Man* and *Mike Fletcher* and that Wilde had popularized in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Like Moore's "young man" and the dilettantes that people *Dorian Gray*, Machen's male protagonists are representative of the decadent social type that emerged as a result of the rift between the professional and business middle class. Indeed, some of them are aspiring literary types themselves, though none make the kind of artistic compromises that their real-life counterparts did. Dyson, for example, who figures in "The Inmost Light" and again resurfaces in Machen's next Keynotes publication, *The Three Imposters* (1895), is endowed with "a good classical education and a positive distaste for business" (*Great God Pan* 112-13). Like so many of his real-life counterparts, Dyson has been unable to attend university due to his father's precarious finances (114). Dyson, then, is self-educated in many respects as were many of the decadent writers and he claims in a Moore-like manner that his university has been Piccadilly (114). His dilettantish existence as a literary man who writes purely for his own pleasure is supported by an inheritance from an uncle. Furthermore, his high literary endeavours are misunderstood by his lowbrow friends--friends like Salisbury who reads novels that deal "with sport and love in a manner that suggested the collaboration of a stud-groom and a ladies' college" (136). To these friends, we are told, Dyson's "literary labours . . . were a profound mystery" and they "searched the railway bookstalls in vain for the result of so many hours spent at the Japanese bureau" (155). Clarke, of the first story, "The Great God Pan," is similarly endowed with a Japanese bureau, a sign of the cultivated dilettante. Though not a literary man in the same way as Dyson, Clarke nevertheless prides himself on his "literary ability" and scorns published literature, preferring instead "reading, compiling, and arranging and rearranging" his investigations into esoteric and "morbid" subjects (*Great God Pan* 19, 18).

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[5] Machen was very interested in the design features of the book and encouraged Lane to include an etched frontispiece: "Don't you think an etched frontispiece adds very much to a book," he asked Lane, "A genuine etching is now a perfect rarity" (Letter to Lane, 3 February 1894).

In their privileging of the esoteric, Machen's "young men" valorize the anti-bourgeois and anti-professional values of the decadents who tried to break free of their class origins. Like real-life decadents, Machen's characters see their dilettantism as contrasting starkly with a middle-class professionalism. Thus, Dr. Black of "The Inmost Light," resents being forced to pursue "professional studies" because it means his interests in "curious and obscure branches of knowledge" must be sacrificed (162). Machen's protagonists are all characterized by their dilettantish pursuits in the area of alternative cultures and forms of knowledge. Austin of "The Great God Pan" is "famous for his intimate knowledge of London life, both in its tenebrous and luminous phases," while Dyson of "The Inmost Light" knows about crimes of the London underworld that don't get reported in the papers which are only interested in what he describes as "the commonplace and brutal murders" (*Great God Pan* 37, 116).

Similarly, Dyson's home reflects his oppositional cultural interests. In contrast with his lowbrow friend Salisbury's bourgeois home with its "green rep . . . oleographs, [and] . . . gilt framed mirror," Dyson's reflects "all the colours of the East" with its "strangely worked curtains," its "oak armoire" with "jars and plates of old French china," and "black and white etchings not to be found in the Haymarket or in Bond Street" which "stood out against the splendour of a Japanese paper" (137, 137-38). Austin of "The Great God Pan," has similarly exotic furnishings. His rooms are "furnished richly, yet oddly, where every chair and bookcase and table, every rug and jar and ornament seemed to be a thing apart, preserving each its own individuality" (62). Of course, the "individuality" of Austin's and of Dyson's furniture in contrast with the common and vulgar decor of Salisbury's rooms is symbolic of the individuality of its owner, whose cultivation of eccentric tastes is part of his attempt at distinguishing himself from bourgeois consumer culture. And yet, ironically, as Rita Felski notes, this form of dilettantism--"the search for ever more arcane objects not yet trivialized by mass reproduction"--merely "echoes the same cult of novelty which propels the logic of capitalist consumerism" (99). Ultimately, the decadent's "attempt to create a uniquely individual style reveals his inevitable reliance upon the very categories of evaluation against which he ostensibly pits himself" (Felski 99). The same might be said of Machen's book, a book that, in appearance, attests to its distinction from cheap forms of popular fiction and yet which employs the genres of this kind of mass-produced fiction. Like the decadent dilettantes of Machen's stories, his book "reli[es] on the very categories of evaluation against which [it] ostensibly pits itself" (Felski 99). In attempting to promote the alternative culture of the dilettante decadent, Machen cannot escape the terms of the bourgeois culture he is trying to oppose.

Machen's style and his representation of an artistic, bohemian culture through his dilettante protagonists aligned *The Great God Pan* with what J. A. Spender called the "new fiction" produced by those who counted themselves among the literary élite. And yet, on the other hand, the book was also associated with cheap popular fiction. As in the more general criticisms of decadence that I have described above, critics who recognized a collaboration of popular and highbrow elements were disturbed. From an artistic viewpoint, for example, the popular elements lowered the status of the work as art. Thus, a reviewer for the *Guardian* exhorted Machen to "make a choice between the art of fiction and penny-a-lining" (*Precious Balms* 8) instead of producing a hybrid work that was unsatisfactory from the point of view of art and from the point of view of popular fiction.[6] The reviewer for the *Belfast News Letter* made a similar complaint. The hybrid nature of his work, according to this reviewer, would fail to satisfy any kind of reader. On the one hand, Machen's book, he explained, would prove "mystifying" in its treatment of the occult to his less well-educated readers while, on the other hand, it was simply "poking fun at his intellectual readers about the unseen" (*Precious Balms* 2). One reviewer, supposing that the writer fancied himself an "artist," balked at the notion that the book was in any way a work of art. "In our judgement," he declared, "this is what children call 'a frightened story', and as an artistic piece of fiction, it calls for no serious consideration" (*Cork Examiner*, qtd. in *Precious Balms* 8). In their zeal for a kind of literary homogeneity, these critics were attempting to maintain distinctions between kinds of literary works, with these kinds being determined according to readership. Books like Machen's, and indeed other writers classed as decadent, threatened to erase these distinctions as they promiscuously mixed elements of high and low. The intellectuals and purists among critics did not want to be catered to by the same book that addressed lowbrow tastes.

Moral critics, on the other hand, feared the effects on a general readership of more daring and mature fodder best reserved for a specific audience of intellectuals or highbrows. Thus, while the reviewer for the *Cork Examiner* found Machen's book childish, other reviewers were quick to point out that this was no book for "imaginative young people" or "the proverbial girl of fifteen," let alone children (*Yorkshire Post* 3; *Whitehall Review* 18). Less worried about the "artistry" or lack thereof in the work, these critics were concerned about access to this kind of fiction. Their insistence that the book was not for young people was necessary because, as a romance in the Stevensonian vein, it certainly appeared to be the kind of popular fiction directed at such readers. For these critics, the treatment of more advanced subject matter within a popular form represented a disturbing disruption of genre conventions that constituted in their minds a decadent text. *The Great God Pan* combined elements of both romance and realism--the "high imaginative faculty" (*Academy* 166), that was a characteristic feature of romance, with the chirurgical interests of realist fiction. The result was, according to the reviewer for the *Weekly Sun*, "an imaginative art eaten into by the canker of morbidity and reeking with the air of decay and death" (2). For these critics Machen's attempts to mediate between high and low was not an instance of a collaboration resulting in a work that was both artistic and popular. In their minds what it produced was a popular fiction rotting, infected, and diseased from its contact with so-called "high art."

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[6] *Precious Balms* is a collection, compiled by Machen himself, of reviews of Machen's works.

The book, then, failed to provide the compensatory allegory that characterized the Stevensonian romance and therefore broke the rules of the genre. Thus, where Stevenson's "gruesome studies in dehumanisation" were "justified by the fine turn he gave them in his 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'," Machen's were not (*Guardian*; qtd. in *Precious Balms* 7). Unlike Stevenson's more allegorical tales of terror, Machen's book was "[s]o strangely terrible and unclean," according to the *Literary World*, "that its perusal leaves an evil odor on the air of the mind, and we are unable to discover any counterbalance in the way of lesson or deduction" (7). Other reviewers for papers like the *Westminster Gazette* and the *Yorkshire Post* similarly commented on the lack of allegory necessary to redeem Machen's story. In not providing an allegory, Machen broke the rules of the genre, producing a book that was "disgust[ing]" (*Athenaeum* 375; *Lady's Pictorial*, qtd. in *Precious Balms* 7), "evil" (*Pall Mall Gazette* 4; *Literary World* 7), "morbid" (*Literary News* 44; *Lady's Pictorial*, qtd. in *Precious Balms* 7; *Weekly Sun* 2), "repulsive" (*Scotsman* 3; *Manchester Guardian*, qtd. in *Precious Balms* 4; *Yorkshire Post*, 3) and "unwholesome" (*Whitehall Review* 18). Moreover it was "unmanly" (*Lady's Pictorial*, qtd. in *Precious Balms* 13), precisely what the newly-invigorated masculine romance celebrated by Stevenson, Haggard, and Lang was not meant to be.

Machen's mixture of romance and realism, or what the *Whitehall Review* called "[t]he mingling of old mythology with *fin de siècle* Piccadilly" (18), resulted in what many at the time considered "most truly decadent," (Spender 101) but what we now more generally call a horror story. Machen, who categorized Poe as "The Supreme Realist," viewed his work as a form of realism in that, like Dr. Raymond in *The Great God Pan*, Machen wanted to "lift the veil," to see the strange reality beyond material existence (*Glorious Mystery* 81). In *The Shape of Fear*, Susan J. Navarette examines the way in which the *fin de siècle* decadent horror tale responded to nineteenth-century scientific theories by embodying the cultural anxieties these theories produced. These texts were realist in the sense that writers of these tales developed "structural, stylistic, and thematic systems" in order "to record and to reenact in narrative form what they understood to be the entropic, devolutionary, and degenerative forces prevailing within the natural world" (Navarette 6). From the point of view of cultural critics of decadence, however, these texts were also in Nordau's words "psycho-physiologically accurate," but only insofar as they exposed the "psychological and physiological stigmata of their makers" (Navarette 188). That writers of decadent texts were morbid, neurotic, hysterical, and degenerate was a critical commonplace of the counter-decadent discourse. *The Literary News* said of *The Great God Pan*, for example, that it was "too morbid to be the production of a healthy mind" (44) and numerous other examples of this kind of scapegoating exist in the reviews of the period.

Like Navarette, Linda Dowling also sees decadence as a serious intellectual engagement with the scientific theories of the day, though Dowling focuses specifically on language. Decadence, Dowling argues "emerged from a linguistic crisis, a crisis in Victorian attitudes towards language brought about by the new comparative philology earlier imported from the continent" (*Language* xi-xii). Both Navarette and Dowling focus on how decadence reflects this crisis in stylistic terms and both see disruption, hesitancy, and what Dowling calls the "unutterability topos" as a central feature of decadent stylistics (*Language* 161). For Navarette, these stylistic effects "*embody*, rather than merely emphasize themes of madness, alienation, and decay" (211), while for Dowling they represent attempts at linguistic renewal in a time of cultural crisis (*Language* xv). Ultimately, for Dowling, decadence in Britain existed primarily as a series of stylistic effects. The "displacement of cultural ideals and cultural anxiety onto language," she argues, "explains why we also glimpse in the background of Victorian Decadence no lurid tales of sin and sensation and forbidden experience but a range of stylistic effects, of quiet disruptions and insistent subversions" (*Language* 104).

But the absence of lurid tales of sin and sensation and the abundance of stylistic disruptions, hesitancies and silences was also, more practically, a function of the conditions of production that governed the British literary field of the 1890s. Quite simply, the force of moral pressure was too strong within late-Victorian culture to make possible the production of lurid tales of sin and sensation on a par with what was being produced in France. As I have suggested earlier, publishers and, consequently, authors had to proceed with extreme caution in a climate where the wrath of the circulating libraries and of organizations like the National Vigilance Association had serious consequences. Gaps, silences, and hesitancies stood in for the subject matter that could not be written about under the conditions that dominated the literary field of the 1890s. These gaps, silences and indeterminacies are precisely the kind of feature that Hichens's Henley of "The Collaborators" would have brought to his collaboration with the decadent Trenchard as a "check" when Trenchard tried to "make the story impossibly horrible or fantastic" (120).

Some writers, like Wilde, turned what were, in a sense, stylistic imperatives in the context of a puritanical culture, from an evil necessity into a clever artistic strategy. If Wilde was influenced in his writing of *Dorian Gray* by the literary marketplace, he was not, as a member of the literary élite, going to admit it to his detractors. Where his detractors read evil and corruption in Wilde's silences, gaps and indeterminacies, Wilde turned the tables on them. Writing to the editor of the *Scots Observer* in response to its scathing review of the story, Wilde said,

> [i]t was necessary, sir, for the dramatic development of this story to surround Dorian Gray with an atmosphere of moral corruption. . . . To keep this atmosphere vague and indeterminate and wonderful was the aim of the *artist* who wrote the story. I claim, sir, that he has succeeded. Each man sees his own sins in Dorian Gray. What Dorian Gray's sins are no one knows. He who finds them has brought them. (*Selected Letters* 82; emphasis added)

Wilde's artistic defence of his vagueness and indeterminacy, then, has the added bonus of exposing the prurience of his detractors. Wilde used this antagonistic defence of his stylistic indeterminacy as the basis of the epigrams that formed the preface he would write for the book version of *Dorian Gray*. Many of these epigrams emphasize the role of the reader as the maker of meaning in the text, most notably, "[t]hose who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming" and [i]t is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors" (*Complete Works* 17). But despite Wilde's clever artistic defence of his vagueness and indeterminacy, there were, of course practical and strategic reasons governing Wilde's style, not least of which was the fact that it was originally written for a family magazine, a fact that naturally bore some weight in the vague and indeterminate nature of its style.

For all Wilde's cleverness in defending his use of vagueness and indeterminacy, it did not save his work from charges of decadence and indecency. Nonetheless, it did provide a model for writers following him as they took on decadent subject matter. Vagueness and indeterminacy were important features of decadence, then, not only in their capacity for embodying cultural anxieties of the period, but also as part of a strategic effort to publish more "advanced" material in an extremely hostile climate. These stylistic features provided a means of mediating between the claims of high art and the claims of the marketplace. One could defend them artistically, as Wilde had done, while finding yet another means of attacking the bourgeois *hypocrite lecteur* in the process. Additionally, these indeterminate and disjointed narratives with their silences and gaps, represented a genuinely distinctive artistic style that symbolized the decadent's break with conventional Victorian narrative form. And yet, at the same time, this narrative indeterminacy around *risqué* subject matter was a piece of marketing ingenuity. In seeming to acquiesce to the more reticent public, the silences and indeterminacies of decadent texts enabled them to be published and saved writers and publishers from prosecution. But also, since there was as much, if not more, prurience than reticence among the general reading public, this indeterminate style offered titillation for the reader.

Machen was undoubtedly one of the decadent writers who recognized the value of Wilde's vague and indeterminate style. Though Machen's debt to Wilde is not acknowledged in the reviews of the work which are more interested in the book's connection to the popular tales of Stevenson, Wilde was, no doubt, a significant influence on Machen--a model for how to mediate between the claims of high art and the literary marketplace. After all, his meeting with Wilde and his reading of *Dorian Gray*, a story he was "a good deal impressed by," coincided with his own determination to produce more popular work (Machen, *A Few Letters* 29). These events occurred in the summer of 1890 when the controversy over *Dorian Gray* was at its height and when Machen began working on his own vague and indeterminate tale, *The Great God Pan*.[7] Already, I have indicated Machen's debt to Wilde in the matter of the characterization of his dilettantes, all of whom are endowed with esoteric and aesthetic tastes and knowledges similar to those of Dorian Gray. But Machen was also indebted to Wilde in stylistic terms as well. Like Wilde, Machen tries to use the vagueness and indeterminacy which was in part imposed by the moral scruples of the British public to an artistic end. But if Wilde intended his vagueness and indeterminacy to expose the hypocrisies of his reading public, Machen teases his readership with his omissions, checking himself, and constantly failing to deliver just when it seems we might be provided with salacious details.

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[7] Wilde, who was working on his preface for the book version of *Dorian Gray*, showed it to Machen while dining with him at the Florence on a second occasion that summer

The story is full of gaps, silences, and omissions, most of which concern interactions with the god Pan, and the reader is continually made aware that s/he knows less than the dilettante decadents in the story whose interests lie in arcane and forbidden knowledge. At one point, for example, Clarke, whose Japanese bureau "teemed with documents on the most morbid subjects" takes up one of these documents (*Great God Pan* 18). It describes the interaction of Helen V. with Rachel M., a girl she befriends and brings to the woods to consort with the God Pan. When Clarke reaches the point in the document when Rachel is about to reveal what she experienced in the woods, Clarke suddenly closes the book, denying the reader access to the strange and terrible secrets of the god Pan. This striking omission is further emphasized as Clarke goes on to recall that when he had first heard this story he had interrupted it at the very same point at which he had slammed the book shut. But despite Clarke's interruption, his friend Phillips, the narrative tells us, "had told his story to the end, concluding: '[Helen V.'s] flight remains a mystery to this day; she vanished in broad sunlight; they saw her walking in a meadow, and a few moments later she was not there'" (28). Within the space of two pages the reader has twice been titillated and twice been denied access to the knowledge that only the characters in the story have. A similar incident involves Austin, another of the dilettante decadents of the story. He sees only a few words before flinging down a manuscript detailing Vaughn's "nameless infamies"--a manuscript written by a man

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(Machen, *A Few Letters* 30). The last time Machen saw Wilde was in the midst of the Wilde trials. Wilde, he said, complimented him on the success of *The Great God Pan* "smiling and murmuring 'un grand succès, un grand succès'" (Machen, *A Few Letters* 31).

whose witnessing of Vaughn's exploits have driven him insane and flings it down with horror (92).

These documents that threaten to destroy those that read them just as the incidents they recount have destroyed those who have written them symbolize the "decadent" text Machen's story might have been had he not employed a reticence in the telling of it. Machen's gaps, however, make what would otherwise have been an unpublishable story publishable just as Henley's "checks" in Hichens's story make his collaboration with the decadent Trenchard publishable. As Machen's text stands, it is unlike those rare manuscripts that circulate among the decadent dilettantes in the story, manuscripts like those found in Clarke's collection that detail the "most morbid subjects" (18). So too, the book is unlike the arcane occult and pornographic texts that Machen had access to in his work in the publishing underground. On the contrary, Machen's gaps enable the story to be more broadly circulated beyond the few dilettante readers who constituted the ideal readership of decadents and others among the literary élite. In deciding to write for a more popular readership, Machen had abandoned his earlier style, a style which had been of interest only to the dilettantes who served as customers of publishers and booksellers like Redway and Robson and Kerslake. The gaps turned Machen's previously unmarketable esoteric knowledge into a marketable commodity while still advertising an esoteric knowledge to like-minded souls among the literary avant-garde as Machen mediated between the claims of art and the claims of the marketplace.

But this mediation failed to produce a book that appealed broadly across a general and a more sophisticated readership. Despite his vagueness, Machen's text was still too explicit for some who deplored the book's "unclean . . . suggestions" (*Literary World* 7) and the "glimpses" it provided of things that were "singularly repulsive" (*Manchester Guardian*; qtd. in *Precious Balms* 4). For others, Machen's vagueness made the book quite simply "absurd" (*Westminster Gazette* 2, *Echo* 1). It was an "impossible subject" for treatment in a popular form according to the *Lady's Pictorial* (qtd. in *Precious Balms* 7). This sentiment seems to have been shared by the *Westminster Gazette* who, on the one hand, "congratulate[d]" the author on "having failed in the courage to make plain the mysterious horrors" of a tale meant for popular readership while, on the other hand, acknowledging the "inchoate and confused" story such reticence produced (2). For other, less faint-hearted reviewers, Machen had, on the contrary, not been courageous enough, and his lack of courage undermined what they described as the potential "art" of the work. "His art" declared the reviewer for the *Observer*, has been hampered by the limitations imposed upon it through his having to leave his ingenious horror 'indescribable' and 'unutterable' from first to last. . . . the general effect of [the book] . . . is, we fear, hardly so creepy as it would have been if it had dared to be intelligible" (qtd. in *Precious Balms* 1). Similarly, the reviewer for *Woman* criticized what he saw as the writer's belief that "the art of writing is the art of leaving out" and declared that the art of writing was also "the art of leaving in" (7). In focusing on Machen's failure to produce "art," these reviewers neglect to consider what was at stake for Machen in being more explicit about his bogeys than he had been. The reviewer for the *Observer* who essentially accused Machen of lacking the artistic *daring* to be intelligible refers to the "limitations imposed" upon Machen, but his reference implies that these were self-imposed (qtd. in *Precious Balms* 1). But Machen's "having to leave his ingenious horror 'indescribable' and 'unutterable'," was, if self-imposed, at least based on a very real sense of the conditions of production and reception in late-Victorian England. These conditions determined that decadence was produced within very circumscribed conditions and that even if reticence was employed such work was likely to be received with hyperbolic reactions of outrage by highly vocal moral watchdogs like Spender for whom, "incoherent" or not, *The Great God Pan* was a "most truly decadent . . . nightmare of sex" (101).

(ii) Transcending Genre: High/Low Collaboration in M. P. Shiel's *Prince Zaleski*

Another decadent work that was issued by the Bodley Head in the midst of the counter-decadent campaign in the press was *Prince Zaleski* by M. P. Shiel, published in February 1895. Shiel had come to England from Montserrat in 1885 and *Prince Zaleski* was his first published book. True to his professional middle-class origins, Shiel came to England with the intention of trying for a position in the Colonial Office. If he could not get a post, he would teach and read for his BA. Shiel did not get a position in the Colonial Office and did end up teaching at a number of schools in the 1880s. Later he claimed he had got his degree during this period and had also begun to study for yet another "profession," medicine, but these claims have never been verified. It is not clear how he supported himself from 1889 until 1895 when *Zaleski* was published, though he seemed, during this period, to have determined on a literary career. Like many of his decadent counterparts, Shiel initially resigned himself to the necessity of hack-work. His first published story in London was a prize story for *Rare Bits* in December 1889. He also served as an assistant to the editor of a weekly paper called *The Messenger* and began making fairly regular contributions to the *Strand Magazine*, the Newnes magazine that published the Sherlock Holmes stories. Through a Mrs. Gladstone, a woman from the West Indies, Shiel made the acquaintance of W. T. Stead with whom Shiel did some work. Finally, in early 1894, Shiel offered his *Zaleski* manuscript to the Bodley Head.

Like the other fiction I have discussed in this and the previous chapter, Shiel's *Zaleski* represented a collaboration of high and low, applying a highly elevated style with archaic vocabulary to the popular genre of the detective story. The detective story was one of the most popular genres of the 1890s thanks largely to the Sherlock Holmes stories of Arthur Conan Doyle.[8] Shiel's intervention was timely given that Doyle had killed off Holmes in December of 1893 and Shiel no doubt saw the potential profitability of creating another detective hero. That Shiel did not offer his Zaleski stories to the *Strand Magazine*, for whom he had already produced some work, but rather to the Bodley Head, the centre of the young literary élite, is telling. Though eager to profit from a popular literary trend, Shiel also had high artistic aspirations and the Bodley Head had a reputation for being able to sell and attract attention to the works of the young aspiring literary élite.

Prince Zaleski consists of three stories, cases which are brought by "Shiel," the named narrator, to Zaleski, an exiled Russian prince living in a former abbey in Monmouthshire. Like Doyle's Holmes, Zaleski suffers from *ennui*, is anti-bourgeois, has exotic tastes and arcane knowledges, and indulges in drug-taking (Zaleski smokes cannabis). Zaleski, however, is much further removed from society and contemporary culture than his counterpart. He lives the life of an exile and hermit, reads no newspapers, rarely leaves his hermitage, and dresses himself in Asiatic dress. His surroundings, too, are far more extravagantly appointed than Holmes's. Zaleski reposes in a room behind a door "tapestried with . . . python's skin" in the "semi-darkness of the very faint greenish lustre [which] radiate[s] from an open censerlike *lampas* of fretted gold in the centre of the domed encausted roof. . . . The hangings [are] of wine-coloured velvet, heavy, gold-fringed and embroidered at Nurshedebad" (3-4). He is surrounded by curios: a palaeolithic implement, a Chinese 'wise man', a Gnostic gem, an amphora of Graeco-Etruscan work, Flemish sepulchral brasses, runic tablets, miniature paintings, a winged bull, Tamil scriptures on lacquered leaves of the talipot, medieval reliquaries richly gemmed, Brahmin gods, and an open sarcophagus which rested on three brazen trestles and contained the mummy of an ancient Memphian, etc. (4-5). In degree, then, Shiel's detective exceeds Doyle's in decadence.

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[8] Sutherland says that "by the mid-1890s" 240 "of the 800 weekly papers in Britain . . . were carrying some variety of detective story" (182).

The stories, however, are the familiar fodder of the detective genre. The first case--"The Race of Orven"--concerns the murder of a wealthy patriarch of the Orvens, an aristocratic but no longer wealthy English family; the second--"The Stone of the Edmundsbury Monks"--treats the murder of Sir Jocelin Saul, orientalist and descendent of a great English family, also in decline; the third--"The S. S."--concerns a mysterious rash of murders and/or suicides all over Europe which are seemingly linked. Like many *fin de siècle* examples of this genre, the theme of degeneration figures largely in the stories from the sterile family lines of the Orvens and the Sauls, to the insanity that taints the Orven family line, to the more widespread degeneration of the European nations that forms the motive of the mass killings in the final story.

In many respects, then, Shiel's book is no more decadent than Doyle's stories and bears nothing to distinguish itself from purely commercial work. The incorporation of decadent elements into this type of popular fiction was, after all, not unprecedented. Doyle, for example, had incorporated decadence unproblematically into this popular genre. Context and style, however, counted for much in laying charges of decadence against works in this period. Popular novels which featured decadence like Marie Corelli's *Wormwood* were not mistaken for decadent. Corelli's style and moralizing militated against such a possible charge as did the novel's publication venue; Bentley was not a publisher of decadence. Similarly, Doyle's Holmes stories may have featured a suspiciously decadent Holmes but were not considered decadent. Doyle's style bore none of the traces of an affinity with art-for art's sake principles. Besides which, the stories appeared in the respectable pages of the *Strand Magazine*.

Shiel's *Zaleski*, however, in being brought out by the decadent Bodley Head at a point in time when the decadence of fiction was being hotly disputed in the press, bore additional scrutiny. On the one hand, *Prince Zaleski* was decadent by association. As one reviewer put it, "[a]s is the *Yellow Book* to *The Strand Magazine*, so is *Prince Zaleski* to Sherlock Holmes" (*Vanity Fair Literary Supplement* i). On the other hand, Shiel's elaborate style suggested that decadence was simply more than a superficial element of the book but rather was more literally embodied within the text itself. So thought the *Guardian* reviewer who complained, "Prince Zaleski might very well have been written to justify all that Max Nordau tells us about 'higher degenerates.' The Prince clearly belongs to that class, and, judging by the style and the ideas, we think the author must also be of it" (917).

The style that the *Guardian* reviewer so strongly objects to is Shiel's elaborate, exotic style, the use of archaisms and foreign words--what other reviewers called Shiel's "inflated language" and "extravagance of . . . description" and "tropical luxuriance difficult of attainment by any but Oriental or Hibernian writers" (*Vanity Fair Literary Supplement* ii; *Times* 8). This style comes through most strongly in the descriptions of Zaleski's abode and character. The *Guardian* reviewer's more explicit charge of decadence or degeneracy made against Shiel and the story is more implicitly supported by the *Times* reviewer's description of Shiel's writing as "Oriental or Hibernian." Though the *Times* reviewer is ultimately complimentary about the work, his description of Shiel's style invokes races that were highly implicated in the *fin de siècle* discourse of degeneration as examples of primitive and therefore degenerate races. But if for these reviewers Shiel's style made the work and its writer decadent or degenerate, for Shiel the style made the work art and made the writer an exemplary artist. From Shiel's point of view, his poetic style made *Prince Zaleski* transcend the base and, to his mind, inartistic, Holmes story. Shiel had a snobbish contempt for Doyle and his detective hero and balked at comparisons with the more famous writer: "Why do you insist on comparing me with Conan Doyle?" he asked his sister, "Conan Doyle does not pretend to be a poet. I do" (Letter to Gussie Shiell, 30 April 1895).

Though Shiel may well have intended to profit from the public interest in detective stories, Doyle's in particular, his turn to the Bodley Head rather than the *Strand Magazine* with his stories indicates a degree of strategic calculation on Shiel's part. After all, Doyle, even as a writer of popular fiction, was highly regarded within the period. His stories met with critical acclaim and Doyle himself was not uninterested in matters of style. Like the decadents he too acknowledged a debt to Meredith, Stevenson, and Wilde, the artistic/popular models the decadents tried to emulate.[9] Shiel's stories give every indication of an intentional attempt to write against his more popular rival in the genre as he takes every opportunity to outdo Doyle. Many critics believed he had. The *Times* saw Zaleski as a decided advance on "the criminal detective so long the darling of a certain school of novelists," finding him to be a "more gifted personage--the *dilettante* Œdipus" --than the fodder of standard detective fare (8).

At every turn Shiel sought to better Doyle, to produce a collaboration between the popular and the high artistic that would transcend the limits of its chosen genre. The exaggerated decadence of Zaleski which I described above is a case in point. So too is Shiel's recourse to digressive intellectual diatribes which contrast his stories sharply with Doyle's which were known for their "directness and pith" and "free[dom] from padding" (Joseph Bell, rev. of *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* in *Bookman* December 1892; qtd. in Green xxx-xxxi). From the beginning of the book, Shiel determines to set himself in opposition to Doyle. The opening sentences of the first story evoke an atmosphere very different than the cosy Baker Street bachelor quarters of Holmes:

> Never without grief and pain could I remember the fate of Prince Zaleski--victim of a too importunate, too unfortunate Love, which the fulgor of the throne itself could not abash; exile perforce from his native land, and voluntary exile from the rest of men! Having renounced the world, over which, lurid and inscrutable as a falling star, he had passed, the world quickly ceased to wonder at him; . . .
>
> I reached the gloomy abode of my friend as the sun set. It was a vast palace of the older world standing lonely in the mist of woodland, and approached by a sombre avenue of poplars and cypresses, through which the sunlight hardly pierced. (1-2)

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[9] In his introduction to *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, Richard Lancelyn Green provides an account of the critical reception of the Holmes stories and discusses the influence of Wilde, Stevenson, and Meredith on Doyle (xxx-xxxiv; xvi).

This passage is certainly more evocative of Poe's hermit-like characters and eerie, otherworldly settings--more *Fall of the House of Usher*--than it is Doyle's bachelor London. And Shiel certainly echoed Poe as strongly as he did in order to distinguish his work from that of Doyle's. While Shiel shunned comparisons with Doyle, he sought comparisons with Poe whose Dupin he described as "*the* detective and father of detectives" and "Zaleski," he declared, was a "legitimate son" of Dupin while Holmes was his "bastard son" (qtd. in Morse, *Works* 514).[10]

The comparison with Poe is apt, not least because Poe, like Meredith and Stevenson who were also admired by the decadents, was a writer whose popularity bridged the "great divide" between the literary élite readership and the popular readership. Poe was, as one reviewer who called Shiel a "true disciple" of Poe claimed, "a great literary artist, as well as a clever constructor of plots," his artistry appealing to the elect while his plots appealed more broadly to the larger reading public (*Speaker* 278). The existence of distinct readerships for Poe in *fin de siècle* Britain is attested to by the variety of publication venues for his work at this time. While his élite *fin de siècle* readership was catered to by publishers like Smithers (who published Poe in 1899) and Chatto and Windus (who published the "choice works" of Poe with an introduction by Baudelaire), the masses received their Poe at the hands of publishers of cheap fiction like Walter Scott, Newnes, and Ward Lock (who published Poe in 1889, 1890, and 1891 respectively). Shiel's desire to be compared with Poe rather than with Doyle speaks to the desire of decadents to find literary models who mediate successfully between the claims of high art and the demands of the literary marketplace or transcend the limits of genre, writers who are great stylists but who are also able to attract the larger reading public by constructing the plots that they believed appealed to this class of reader.

Though comparisons with Poe were numerous in the reviews of the time, Shiel did not seem to be able to span the "great divide" between reading publics as Poe did. For the most part, his work was seen as "high art" for, in the words of the *Speaker* reviewer, "the select few who can appreciate delicate work, and who are not bored by a touch of metaphysics" (278). The *Vanity Fair* reviewer concurred: "[*Prince Zaleski* is] a very superior article altogether, and intended for the delight of a very superior class of readers" (i). Shiel's artistry overwhelmed the plot and his stories, with their "over-elaboration" and "superabundance of detail" were "not quite simple and direct enough" for the average reader of such stories, the "most successful" of which, argued the *Athenaeum* reviewer, "attain their end by an almost bald clearness of plot" (376; 375-6). His stories were, quite simply, too obscure: "We do not pretend to have entirely understood any one of them," lamented the reviewer for the *Guardian* (917). Shiel, then, was not successful in mediating between the claims of high art and those of the literary marketplace. Though *Prince Zaleski* promised to please the "select few," to the larger readership the book was, at worst, decadent, degenerate, and morbid and, at best, obscure and incomprehensible. High art and decadence thus became aligned in the public mind and this association goes some way to explaining the suspicion with which "Art" was increasingly regarded during and in the immediate aftermath of the Wilde trial, a subject I will treat in the next chapter of the thesis.

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[10] Shiel made these statements in 1924 in an inscribed copy of *Prince Zaleski*.

It was not only the style that the *Guardian* reviewer objected to but also the "ideas" which he declared were the ideas of Nordau's "higher degenerates," the artists that were the central focus of Nordau's highly controversial and popular *Degeneration*. Like Machen's recent *Great God Pan and the Inmost Light* and like Moore's earlier *Confessions of a Young Man*, *Prince Zaleski* glorifies many of the ideals and values of the aesthetes and decadents that were increasingly being pathologized and demonized by a counter-decadent press drawing on the pseudo-scientific discourses of men like Nordau and Lombroso. Zaleski, like the protagonists of Moore's and Machen's works, is a *dilettante* with exotic tastes and obscure and arcane knowledges that represent a counter-knowledge to the kinds of utilitarian and practical knowledges endorsed by an increasingly professionalizing middle class. Zaleski solves all the cases through his unorthodox knowledge of the histories of aristocratic European families and European countries, philology, and of Oriental and ancient Greek and Roman literature, culture and history.

This kind of knowledge was precisely the kind pursued by the sons of professionals who became decadents. It was the "self-culture" so openly disparaged by conservative critics of aestheticism and decadence since the 1880s when Moore offended with his valorization of self-culture in *Confessions of a Young Man*. As was the case with Moore who had been criticized for his disrespect for the classic forms of knowledge and his valorization of alternative knowledges and cultures, Shiel was subject to criticism for his so-called esoteric knowledge. The *Times* critic, for example, attempted to undermine Shiel's claim to superior esoteric knowledge by noting that Shiel was "widely" though "perhaps more widely than exactly" read and by pointing to Shiel's error in describing Sophocles as an "epic poet" (*Times* 8).

Whereas in Zaleski's case this knowledge came more naturally as a result of his aristocratic origins, in the decadents it was an impertinent and deliberately provocative display of allegiance with aristocratic culture against middle-class and professional middle-class culture. So too, the acquisition of this knowledge made a virtue of necessity since, for the most part, the decadents came from professional families in decline. Whereas their fathers were university-educated, they were not. The idea of an aristocratic self-culture enabled decadents to rebel while at the same time acquiring knowledge, notably of a non-utilitarian kind. *Prince Zaleski* then, endorses the distinctly anti-bourgeois and anti-professional inclinations of the decadent by valorizing the aristocratic and eccentric, not to mention anarchistic, Zaleski. Zaleski, Shiel tells us, is "a consummate *cognoscente*--a profound amateur." His specialist knowledge is not used as the professional uses it--i.e. either in the service of the public or in the pursuit of social and economic rewards (Larson xvii). Though through his interventions the innocent are rewarded and the guilty punished, Zaleski takes on a case only insofar as it interests and challenges him. He has no particular philanthropic interests. His knowledge is for knowledge's sake and he eschews ethical and moral imperatives in the same way that the decadents and aesthetes did in their valorization of art-for-art's sake principles.

Significantly, however, the ideas the *Guardian* reviewer finds most offensive in Shiel's book turn on the representation of degeneration in the text, a representation he must counter with recourse to the then-popular theories of Nordau and Lombroso. Significant, I say, because though Shiel employs popular stereotypical representations of the decadent in his portrayal of Zaleski, ultimately he relocates degeneration and decadence in British society, not in the artist or genius, and he re-aligns Zaleski with regeneration and cultural salvation. This realignment begins in the first story when

Zaleski embarks on a critique of the "lack of culture" in the world at present:

> by the term [culture] I mean not so much attainment in general, as *mood* in particular. Whether or when such mood may become universal may be to you a matter of doubt. As for me, I often think that when the era of civilisation begins . . . when the races of the world cease to be credulous, ovine mobs and become critical, human nations, then will be the ushering in of the ten thousand years of a *clairvoyant* culture. But nowhere, and at no time during the very few hundreds of years that man has occupied the earth, has there been one single sign of its presence. In individuals, yes . . . but in humanity never. . . The reason, I fancy, is not so much that man is a hopeless fool, as that Time . . . has, as we know, only just begun. (28-29)

In the process of this discourse, Zaleski counters the popular belief that culture is degenerating. He insists rather that it is already degenerate or, more properly, primitive and moving towards regeneration, threatened always by degenerating forces such as "Medical Science" which Zaleski condemns on eugenic principles. "Medical Science," argues Zaleski, is a means by which we "conserve our worst" and what civilization regards as "progress" is really "decadence, fatty degeneration" (143, 145).

At the same time as he locates decadence in what he calls the "thoughtless humanism" that is traditionally regarded as progress, he counters what has been presented to the reader through popular signifiers of decadence as his own decadence (147). He and his friend "Shiel" are exceptional individuals, indications of the possibility for society to develop beyond the "ovine mob" culture that currently exists. They are proof that

> [i]t *is* possible, by taking thought, to add one cubit--or say a hand, or a dactyl--to your stature; you *may* develop powers slightly--very slightly, but distinctly, both in kind and degree--in advance of those of the mass who live in or about the same cycle of time in which you live. But it is only when the powers to which I refer are shared by the mass--when what, for want of another term, I call the age of the Cultured Mood has at length arrived--that their exercise will become easy and familiar to the individual; and who shall say what presciences, prisms, *séances*, what introspective craft, Genie apocalypses, shall not *then* become possible to the few who stand spiritually in the van of men. (32-33)

The distinction possessed by Zaleski and "Shiel" in their ability to transcend the mass in the push towards a Cultured Mood is far from a gift however. Rather, it is a "handicap," a martyrdom almost, for "[t]o attain anything, [the distinctive individual] must need screw the head up into the atmosphere of the future, while feet and hands drip dark ichors of despair from the crucifying cross of the crude present--*a horrid strain*" (30, 31).

Incensed at Shiel's reinscription of the terms "decadent," "degenerate," "civilised," "progress," and "culture" and also at his suggestion that figures like Zaleski represent regenerative forces rather than degenerative ones, the reviewer for the *Guardian* cites with mocking disparagement Zaleski's claims about the coming of a clairvoyant culture in order to reinscribe the more familiar senses of these terms. He counters what he sees as a spurious argument by citing the authority of Max Nordau, whose *Degeneration* was widely talked about and had gone into five editions in the four months between its first publication and the publication of the *Guardian* review of *Prince Zaleski* in June 1895 (a rather late review considering the book had come out in early February). Writing less than a month after Wilde's conviction, the reviewer is clearly invested in something more than just writing a bad book review. Rather, I would suggest that he is invested in the larger project of silencing the decadents, a project that I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter. In condemning Zaleski, he means to condemn the author too, a point which he males explicitly: "The Prince clearly belongs to that class [of 'higher degenerate'], and judging by the style and the ideas, we think the author must also be of it" (917). The reviewer uses Nordau to undermine Zaleski's credibility as regenerative man, quoting a portion of the text that represents Zaleski in familiar degenerate terms. The passage depicts Zaleski in deep thought during which time his "small, keen features distorted themselves into an expression of what . . . can only [be] describe[d] as an abnormal *inquisitiveness*--an inquisitiveness most impatient, arrogant, in its intensity. His pupils, contracted each to a dot, became the central *puncta* of two rings of fiery light; his little sharp teeth seemed to gnash . . . till, by a species of mesmeric dominancy," he untangled the problem that had been set before him (*Guardian* 917; *Zaleski* 18).

Certainly this passage, with its focus on the physiognomy of Zaleski, seems to reinforce the idea the he is the primitive and therefore the degenerate the reviewer claims he is. Shiel, however, had argued that Zaleski was only "slightly" in advance of the ovine mob. The reviewer does not really engage with Shiel's argument, an argument that other reviewers had found "convincingly and ably put forth" and "original and always interesting" (*Academy* 312; *National Observer* 482). Nor does he engage with the more general charge that society itself is degenerate. Instead, he counters with the popular and familiar, though by no means universally credited, Nordauian concept of the degenerate genius or artist figure and resorts to what would become an increasingly familiar response of conservative counter-decadents in the aftermath of the Wilde trial--a celebration of philistinism, ordinariness, and mediocrity: "If this is a true prophecy of the general mood of culture in the far future" the reviewer mockingly declares, "how thankful we all ought to be that our lot has been cast in the ages of ovine stupidity!" (917).

The decadent fiction of Dowson and Arthur Moore, Davidson, Machen and Shiel in no way fulfilled the promise decadence seemed to offer to its 1880s proponents George Moore and Havelock Ellis who thought it would advance the British novel. By the late 1880s Moore himself had given up on his decadent aesthetic and even Ellis had little hope that decadence would ever be received by a reticent British culture. Where Moore had aggressively undertaken to transform British fiction in the 1880s, however, his younger followers proceeded more cautiously adopting the "collaborative" model in which they mediated between the claims of high art and the claims of the marketplace. This collaboration between high and popular art, though not ideal for those with high literary ideals, enabled these writers to get published, to begin their careers. At the same time, as I have argued, it gave them a wider venue for the promotion of their alternative social and cultural values. Certainly Dowson, but probably the others also, imagined that, as they established themselves more firmly within the literary field, they would be freer to produce the kind of art they wanted, unmediated by the constraints placed on them by the conditions of publishing. These hopes would be seriously challenged in the wake of the Wilde trial, a trial that gave counter-decadents the ammunition they needed to put an end to decadent trends in fiction and to celebrate, in the words of the *Guardian* reviewer of *Prince Zaleski*, their "ovine stupidity" (917). This stupidity seemed to counter-decadents refreshingly wholesome in contrast to a literary school whose utterly vitiated nature had been finally exposed in the downfall of Oscar Wilde--the high priest of the school.

Part 3

The Decadents after Decadence: Demystifying the Tragic Generation

Chapter 1

Contexts

I

The Hill of Dreams and The Portrait of the Artist as a Decadent Young Man: Machen's Swan Song of Decadence

In the autumn of 1895 Arthur Machen, despite the hostile climate for decadence at this time, began work on a decadent *künstlerroman*, *The Hill of Dreams*. Machen determined that this would be an artistic novel, that it would not mediate between the claims of high art and the claims of the market-place, that it would not represent a collaboration between high and popular art. In this respect, Machen produced the kind of work more generally associated with decadence--a novel that luxuriates in its flamboyant stylistic artistry and that treats with some detail the morbid state of mind of its protagonist. It achieves, I think, what Arthur Symons has described in 1893 as the main characteristics of high art decadence in its "morbid subtlety of analysis . . . and curiosity of form" and in its evocative representation of "a disembodied voice, and yet the voice of a human soul" ("Decadent" 867). These elements of the novel made it virtually unpublishable at the time it was written, though Machen did indeed try to place it. His failure in this regard supports what I have been arguing throughout the thesis and what Havelock Ellis sensed in 1889: the English public was simply not receptive to decadence in the terms in which so many of the writers I have been discussing wanted to pursue it as a literary form.

In its status as a high literary attempt at a decadent novel and in other respects as well, *The Hill of Dreams* bears comparison with George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man*, also a novel in the *kuntslerroman* tradition that was an attempt at an "artistic" novel. But where Moore heralded the emergence of the new brash and rebellious decadent literary type in *Confessions of a Young Man*--what Buchanan called the "modern young man"--Machen, writing in the wake of Wilde's trial and imprisonment, represents the demise of this type in a novel that Wesley Sweetser has called "a monument and an epitaph for the aesthetic-decadent period" ("Arthur Machen" 156-58). Though vastly different in style and tone, Moore's and Machen's novels have certain similarities. Both writers, for example, are more interested in analysis than incident and both describe their works as, in some sense, narratives of the "soul," Moore likening his story to Augustine's *Confessions* but with the "god-tortured soul" replaced with an "art-tortured soul" and Machen describing his story as a "Robinson Crusoe of the soul" (Moore, *Confessions* 35; Machen, Introduction viii). Both novels concentrate on the inner workings of the minds of the protagonists, articulating the tastes, attitudes, values, and ideals of the kind of artist that emerged from the rift between the professional intellectuals and the middle class in the mid-Victorian period. Lucian Taylor, Machen's protagonist, despises the bourgeois provincialism of his neighbours, has decadent tastes in literature (François Villon, Thomas De Quincey, Edgar Allan Poe), is interested in the occult and the arcane, indulges in strange forms of worship involving self-flagellation, and becomes addicted to laudanum, an addiction which results in his death. But though both novels end on a rather sombre note, there is a distinct difference in the post-narrative outcomes they anticipate. Though Moore's novel leaves us with an image of Dayne/Moore "shiver[ing] . . . haggard and overworn" at a table in his grim lodgings as he works away at his novel, we know he will succeed (192). We are, after all, reading the product of these efforts. For Machen's hero, on the other hand, there is no such hope. As in Moore's novel, the concluding scene is of the writer in his miserable lodgings at his desk but in Machen's novel the writer is dead and his work illegible to those who discover him.

For Linda Dowling, who discusses *The Hill of Dreams* in *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*, the novel is a "parable" of what she calls "antinomian Decadence" (154). Dowling argues that the novel is ultimately critical of decadence in that it exposes "the dead end of the cult of style" (160). And certainly this reading is justified by the concluding scene of the novel. Upon finding Lucian dead over his manuscript, the couple who discover him have the following conversation:

> [Man] 'What's all those papers that he's got there?'
>
> [Woman] 'Didn't I tell you? It was crool to see him. He'd got it into 'is 'ead he could write a book; he's been at it for the last six months. Look 'ere.'
>
> She spread the neat pile of manuscript broadcast over the desk, and took a sheet at haphazard. It was all covered with illegible hopeless scribblings; only here and there it was possible to recognise a word.

> [Man] 'Why nobody could read it if they wanted to.'
> [Woman] 'It's like that. He thought it was beautiful. I used to 'ear him jabbering to himself about it, dreadful nonsense it was he used to talk. (*Hill* 308)

As Dowling argues, the novel is critical of the decadent sensibility because the decadent celebrates a form of "solipsism" the only possible outcome of which is "a language so perfected in its private symbolism that it will no longer yield its meaning even to the select few, but only to the unique reader, [the decadent] himself" (*Language* 160).

And yet, if the novel finally reveals the limitations of the decadent sensibility, it also represents in a highly sympathetic manner the plight of the writer aspiring to artistry. In many respects, the ending is highly ambiguous given the pains taken to emphasize the vulgarity and virtual illiteracy (through spelling anomalies and indications of a lower-class dialect) of the man and woman who discover him. Lucian's manuscript may indeed be illegible but there is also a suggestion that the man and woman would not know a work of art if they came upon it. Such an analysis is strengthened by the mercenary interests that occupy the man and woman who, after declaring Lucian's art gibberish, proceed to discuss the woman's inheritance from Lucian and whether her windfall might be compromised if suspicion falls on them regarding Lucian's death. They may not understand art, but they certainly understand money. Art and pecuniary interests are juxtaposed here, as they are throughout the novel, as Lucian faces the familiar plight of the decadent artist struggling to come to terms with an idealized vision of art and the debasing demands of the marketplace.

In this respect, the novel dramatizes the issues facing real-life decadents of the period--Machen and his peers--as they positioned themselves in the literary field. Though initially Lucian holds strictly to the "high art" assumptions that "a painstaking artist in words [is] not respected by the respectable" and that "books should not be written with the object of gaining the goodwill of the landed and commercial interests," he comes to think--as indeed his real-life counterparts like Dowson, Machen, Shiel and Davidson did--that it might be possible to mediate successfully between "Art" and the marketplace (174):

> He was aware that if he chose to sit down now before the desk he could, in a manner, write easily enough--he could produce a tale which would be

> formally well constructed and certain of favourable reception. And it would not be the utterly commonplace, entirely hopeless favourite of the circulating library; it would stand in those ranks where the real thing is skilfully counterfeited, amongst the books which give the reader his orgy of emotions, and yet contrive to be superior, and 'art,' in his opinion. (245-46)

But when such productions are greeted with the disrespect of the so-called respectable middle classes, as Lucian's book is by an "influential daily paper" which asks of his novel, "Where are the disinfectants?," then one might well begin to despair of the task altogether (301). Lucian's illegible manuscript, in this respect, is more than just a representation of the *reductio ad absurdum* of the decadent project that Dowling argues for. It also stands as a testament to the decadents' recognition, particularly in the context of the Wilde trial, of the utter impossibility of communication between the artist and the vulgar reading public who are represented in the figures of Lucian and the vulgar couple respectively.

Both the death of Lucian--a death at least indirectly attributed to an environment and a culture unsympathetic and hostile to the artist--and the unintelligibility of his manuscript in this context, are part of a myth-making on Machen's part as he responds to the backlash against decadence in the wake of the Wilde trial. In literary history, the post-1895 lives of the decadents are often figured in similar terms. The lives and fates of John Davidson, Hubert Crackanthorpe, Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Aubrey Beardsley are figured as sordid, tragic, and miserable and often they are presented as martyrs to art in precisely the way that Lucian is. But while early and often tragic death might well be characteristic of many of those associated with decadence, it is a mistake to foreshorten the period between 1895--a moment that had a profound impact on their literary careers--and their deaths and to represent this time as simply a clocking in of their remaining time on this earth in misery and squalor. On the contrary, decadents stayed actively engaged in the literary field in remarkable contrast to the myth of the isolated decadent. For some, like Machen and Shiel who defied the decadent myth by living until 1947, this activity continued well through the Edwardian and Modernist periods and beyond.

In this part of the dissertation, I go well beyond the usual moment where histories of decadence usually end in an effort to demystify the so-called "tragic generation." Decadence may have died in 1895 but the decadents, unlike Lucian, did not, and they had to adapt themselves to the transformations in the literary field that the Wilde trial occasioned, re-opening the lines of communication between themselves and an audience, however they had now come to understand that audience. Before going on to discuss the ways in which the decadents that have been central to my study went on to fashion themselves in the post-1895 moment, a subject I will take up in the next chapter, I will first outline the contexts in which the decadents found themselves, beginning with the ramifications of the Wilde scandal on the literary field and its effects on the writers and publishers of decadence. I will then go on to establish a brief literary historical context for the Edwardian and Modernist periods and for the status of decadence within these periods as a background against which to consider the literary activities and positionings of the decadents that I will discuss in the next chapter.

II

Decadence, Decadents and the Literary Field in the Shadow of the Wilde Trials

Machen's articulation of the breakdown in communication between the artist and the public in *The Hill of Dreams*, a breakdown figured through the manuscript that is illegible to the vulgar couple, had, it is true, always been an integral part of decadent artistic discourse. Implicit in the discourse was the idea that the artist and the public speak two entirely different languages and each is unintelligible to the other. The "*hypocrite lecteur*" trope invoked so frequently in decadent writing attests to this idea of a communication problem. Similarly, a number of the epigrams in Wilde's preface to *Dorian Gray*--though not formally instances of the "*hypocrite lecteur*" trope--also point to the difficulty of acts of communication between the artist and the public. In these epigrams, Wilde makes a distinction between the "elect" who understand the artist's language and to whom, therefore, "beautiful things mean only Beauty" and the "corrupt" who, in misunderstanding the artist, "find ugly meanings in beautiful things" (*Collected Works* 17). This impasse, however, became strikingly apparent in the months before Machen began his novel when the Wilde trials and the accompanying backlash against decadence foregrounded the differences between artistic and ordinary discourse. While Machen's novel furthers the artistic view of these differences which, like Wilde's epigrams, privilege the beauty of the artist's conceptions over their interpretations by a vulgar public, this public had its own say in the matter of artistic versus ordinary discourse in the months before Machen began writing his novel during the series of trials that brought Wilde and decadence to the centre of public attention.

The trials began in March 1895 when Wilde brought an action for criminal libel against the Marquess of Queensberry who, objecting to the friendship between Wilde and his son, Lord Alfred Douglas, had left a card at Wilde's club on which was written, "To Oscar Wilde posing Somdomite [sic]." The trial garnered a great deal of press attention, particularly once the case broke down when Oueensberry's lawyer, Edward Carson, made it clear in his cross-examination of Wilde that Lord Queensberry's accusation was justifiable and therefore not libellous. Wilde was promptly arrested and charged with committing acts of gross indecency with various male persons. The first of Wilde's two trials on these charges resulted in a hung jury while the second found him guilty, the judge sentencing him to two years hard labour. Though Wilde was not charged with having written indecent or pernicious literature, the fact that his decadent novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, featured prominently as evidence in the trials had serious implications for those associated with decadent literature and for the immediate future of English fiction more broadly.

The Wilde trials were regarded by counter-decadents as an opportunity to re-assert right reason, to expose the corrupting nature of decadence and to undermine the decadent artistic discourse by making a direct link between decadence as a literary practice and Wilde's decadent and deviant sexual practices. The numerous calls in the press for an end to decadence in fiction--a fiction that was regarded as "poisoning the springs of English life" in its promotion of everything from sex-mania to ego-mania to political anarchy--had been steadily mounting since the beginning of 1895 and reached their peak during and in the aftermath of the Wilde trials (Stutfield 843). The trial represented an opportunity for moral crusaders and other counter-decadents to put a definitive end to the poisonous and degenerating influence of decadence on British culture. The strategy for bringing about the demise of decadence was to foreground the irreconcilable differences between artistic and ordinary discourse and consequently between artistic and ordinary culture. The point was to demonstrate that the decadent artistic discourse had perverted the meanings of things: what was beautiful to the artist, was ugly to the ordinary individual and so on. Though these differences, which amounted to a kind of language barrier, between artists and the public, had always existed to some extent, it had been the artist and not the public who had hitherto insisted so firmly on the inability of the artist and the bourgeoisie to communicate. The middle class public, on the other hand, at least to some minds, had heretofore shown too much eagerness to be dictated to by artists regarding cultural matters as the aesthetic fads of the 1880s and 1890s had shown. The Wilde scandal indicated that it was time to assert a bourgeois cultural hegemony even at the expense of being regarded as philistine.

The highlighting of the opposition between an artistic and ordinary discourse from the point of view of the "ordinary" person featured prominently in the Wilde trials. During the libel trial, for example, Carson unapologisingly asserted the views of those he called the "ordinary individual" or "the majority of people" in an effort to undermine Wilde's artistic discourse (Hyde 110). Thus, Carson suggested that the "ordinary individual" might describe *Dorian Gray* as a "perverted novel," to which Wilde responded with a typical decadent disdain for "ordinary" people that such an interpretation was possible only among "brutes," "illiterates," and "Philistines" (Hyde 110). Wilde's repeated assertions of the superiority of artistic discourse as he insisted to Carson that he spoke as an artist and could not "answer apart from art" nettled Carson (Hyde 115). Thus, at one point in the exchange, Carson, losing patience with Wilde, blurted out, in what amounted to a defiant declaration of his ordinariness "I do not profess to be an artist and when I hear you give evidence, I am glad I am not" (Hyde 116).

This attack on a decadent artistic discourse by the advocates of ordinary discourse extended beyond the courtroom to the press. Indeed, the April 6th edition of the *Westminster Gazette* opened its feature article on the first trial by quoting Carson's defiant assertion that he was not an artist ("Art" 1). The *National Observer*, meanwhile, equating decadence with pagan cult practices, denounced the decadents' "hideous conceptions of the meaning of Art" and their "worse than Eleusinian mysteries" (untitled article 547). A week later, *Punch*, a periodical noted more generally for its humorous parodies, printed a strikingly harsh and soberly unhumorous invective against the decadents' perverted notions of "Art," "Culture," "Beauty," and "Poetry. The poem, entitled "Concerning a Misused Term; viz., 'Art' as recently applied to a certain form of Literature," laments the sway this perverted artistic discourse has had over the nation recently and calls for a return of the right meanings of words as expounded by an old-fashioned, Philistine discourse:

> Is this, then, "Art"--ineffable conceit,
> Plus worship of the Sadi-tainted phrase,
> Of pseud-Hellenic decadence, effete,
> Unvirile, of debased Petronian ways?
>
> Is *this* your "Culture," to asphyxiate
> With upas-perfumes sons of English race,
> With manhood-blighting cant-of-art to prate
> The jargon of an epicene disgrace?
>
> Shall worse than pornographic stain degrade
> The name of "Beauty," Heav'n-imparted dower?
> Are *they* fit devotees who late displayed
> The symbol of a vitriol-tainted flower?
>
> And shall the sweet and kindly Muse be shamed
> By unsexed "Poetry" that defiles your page?
> Has Art a mission that may not be named,
> With "scarlet sins" to enervate the age?
>
> All honour to the rare and cleanly prints,
> Which have not filled our homes from day to day
> With garbage-epigrams and pois'nous hints
> How aesthete hierophants fair Art betray!
>
> If such be "Artists," then may Philistines
> Arise, plain sturdy Britons as of yore,
> And sweep them off and purge away the signs
> That England e'er such noxious offspring bore!

The central conflict dramatized in the poem concerns the discrepancy between the artistic discourse of the decadents and the "ordinary" discourse with its celebration of a nationalistic, militaristic, and bourgeois British culture. The "Philistine" speaker of the poem, in calling into question the decadent artists' definitions of art, culture, beauty, and poetry reveals the rather definitive break that occurred in the context of the Wilde trials between the general public and those writers who espoused art-for-art's sake and decadent artistic principles.

That the British middle class had too long accepted such artistic views is again suggested in a poem that appeared in *Punch* a few weeks later. In the poem, entitled "A Philistine Paean; Or, the Triumph of the Timid One," the speaker laments the domination "high" artistic principles have had over him till he "hadn't a taste that [he] dare call his own" (12). Relieved that he is freed of this domination by the fall of decadent, art-for-art's sake, and other high artistic principles, the subject declares, "I know I'm relieved from one horrible bore, -- / I need not admire what I hate anymore" (41-42). Both poems attest to an impasse between artists and the general public in their insistence on the need for a replacement of decadent artistic values which are figured as noxious, foreign, effeminate, and pagan, with clean, Philistine, manly and British values.

The insistence of both poems on the eradication of decadence and its perverted interpretations was indicative of the prevailing sentiment in the press at the time of the Wilde trials. But if artists were unwilling to acknowledge the rejection of their creeds by the ordinary English public, the public had more threatening ways of putting their message across. Using the Wilde trial to condemn the artistic ethos of so many of the young writers of the period who had come to be regarded as "decadents," the press also took the opportunity to threaten the writers themselves. For the press, decadence and the decadents were on trial along with Wilde. The *National Observer*, for example, on the day after Wilde's arrest, called for "another trial at the Old Bailey . . . of the Decadents, of their hideous conceptions of the meaning of Art, [and] of their worse than Eleusinian mysteries" (untitled article 547). Similarly, on the same day, the *Star* declared that while it was of course "absurd to suggest that . . . the 'literature of the decadence' or 'fin de siècle-ism' will or can be arrested upon the warrant of a stipendiary magistrate" they nonetheless hoped that Wilde's case would have an "effect . . . upon the precious 'movement' which imagines that it is a part of literature" (Goodman 78). The *Westminster Gazette*, in whose pages J. A. Spender ("the Philistine") had conducted a vigorous campaign against decadence in the months previous, also used the example of Wilde to condemn decadence more broadly. Commenting on the "terrible risks involved in certain artistic and literary tendencies of the day" the *Westminster Gazette* hoped that the Wilde case would "burn . . . its lesson upon the literary and moral conscience of the present generation" ("Art" 1).

In effect, then, though technically specific works of literature were not, as so many of the writers of these articles pointed out, on trial, the rhetoric employed in these discussions amounted to a kind of trial by press. Certainly many of the "enterprising" publishers that I have discussed earlier felt threatened in such a climate. As James G. Nelson observes of this historical moment, "publishers were not eager to harbor the Decadents or any of the young moderns . . . [and were] fearful . . . to publish anything in the way of literature and art which could be considered immoral" (*Publisher* 58). This cautious approach was particularly true of John Lane, whose Bodley Head was regarded as the main venue for decadent publications. If the spectre of the imprisoned publisher Vizetelly and the furore over Zolaesque realism had been forgotten by the public in the intensity of its latest anti-Wilde and anti-decadent causerie, it loomed large for Lane who quickly reacted to the negative public opinion. In the most obvious of his attempts to purge his firm of its decadent associations, Lane withdrew all Wilde's titles from his list and dropped Beardsley as art editor and illustrator of the *Yellow Book*. Also, in June 1895 he approached Owen Seaman, writer of many of the verse parodies of decadence that appeared in *Punch*, the *World*, and the *National Observer*, with an offer to publish a collection of his parodic verse. In addition, he launched two new named series, the "Arcady Library of keepsake verse" and "Lane's Library of light fiction," series decidedly different in tone than the controversial Keynotes series.

Behind the scenes, Lane hired the young John Buchan, an avowed hater of decadence, as reader for the firm. Lane also put increasing pressure on those of his writers who were associated with decadence to tone down their writing. Through the summer of 1895, for example, Lane exerted considerable pressure on Machen regarding *The Three Imposters*, a book which Lane had committed to publishing in March 1895, before the Wilde trial got under way. Afterwards, however, urging Machen to consider his "literary reputation," Lane apparently tried to induce Machen to alter certain "'dangerous' and 'risky' passages" and suggested that the titles of Machen's other works be omitted from the title page (Machen, letter to Lane, 29 June 1895). In July, Lane apparently went so far as to threaten to "put *The Three Imposters* in a corner" (Machen, letter to Lane, 11 July 1895). According to George Egerton, Lane treated her similarly the following year regarding *Symphonies*, her follow-up to *Keynotes* and *Discords*: "You did not say you wished a 'milk and water' book on entirely different lines to that which made the success of *Keynotes* when we made our autumn arrangements, and now on the eve of completing my book it comes as a back-hander. You gave me the impression on Friday of not caring to continue to publish for 'George Egerton'" (Egerton, *A Leaf* 41-2).

Lane's actions in the case of Machen and Egerton may well have stemmed from a disinclination to continue publishing authors who were so strongly associated in the public mind with decadence. Certainly, many other such writers turned, or were forced to look elsewhere, either immediately or within a few years after 1895. Leonard Smithers, for example, who was an exception to the general timidity that characterized the publishing world at this time, gave "instant financial and emotional relief to the increasingly destitute and demoralized *avant-garde*" (Nelson, *Publisher* 59). He provided a publishing venue for writers like Dowson, Beardsley, Yeats, Symons, Egerton and even Wilde in the increasingly puritanical cultural milieu in the years following the events of 1895. For Smithers, the backlash against decadence and the ensuing timidity of the publishing world represented an incredible boon, enabling him to acquire talented artists for the practically non-existent list of his newly-established firm (estd. late 1894). He boldly declared that he would "publish anything that the others are afraid to," a boast that led to the publication of Arthur Symons's virtually unpublishable decadent *London Nights* (1895) and Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898) which, though not decadent in the least, was a manuscript "no other publisher would touch" (Nelson, "Leonard Smithers" 316).[1] At one point, Beardsley jokingly suggested that Smithers call his firm the "Sodley Bed" (*Letters* 148).

Apart from publishing the books of the pariahs of the literary field, Smithers also established the *Savoy*, a rival publication to the *Yellow Book*, which featured the works of these writers. Smithers's willingness to publish advanced and decadent writing that no other publishers would go near enabled those writers who fell under his wing to maintain their allegiance to their high artistic principles and to remain positioned among the literary élite. With Smithers's support, the writers associated with decadence declared "warfare," according to Yeats, "on the British public at a time when we had all against us" and when "[we] delighted in enemies and in everything that had an heroic aire [sic]" (qtd. in Nelson, *Publisher* 61). Even with this support, however, many of these writers were clearly anxious to distance themselves from the "decadent" label. Indeed, it seemed they were anxious to abandon all labels as Arthur Symons's editorial for the first volume of the *Savoy* indicates: "We have no formulas . . . and we desire no false unity of form or matter. We have not invented a new point of view. We are not Realists or Romanticists, or Decadents. For us, all art is good which is good art" ("Editorial Note" 5). But if Smithers proved one could publish decadence without facing the dock, he did not prove that either publisher or writer could make money from it. Smithers's publications sold very poorly, the *Savoy* folded after one year, and Smithers was bankrupt by 1900 at which point he returned to the more lucrative publishing of pornography and pirated works.[2] Smithers would have no part in promoting the writers associated with decadence in the following Edwardian and Modernist periods.

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[1] In his reader's report for John Lane on Symons's *London Lights*, Davidson wrote, "Ten years ago it would have been to risk a sojourn in Holloway to publish "To One in Alienation" . . . "Leves Amores" . . . "White Heliotrope" . . . [poems included in *London Nights*]" (Reader's Report n.p). Though Nelson indicates that Symons withdrew his book from the Bodley Head over his anger at Beardsley's dismissal from the *Yellow Book*, Lane must also have been quite relieved at not having to publish the book, particularly given the tenor of Davidson's comments which were likely written before Wilde's imprisonment (*Publisher* 63).

Like Smithers, Grant Richards also profited from the Bodley Head's increasingly conservative policies in the years following the Wilde trial. Establishing his firm in January 1897, Richards approached or was approached by a number of former Bodley Head authors including Machen, Shiel, Davidson, Egerton, and Vernon Lee who, whether justifiably or not, were associated with the now unpopular aesthetic and/or decadent movements. Richards, however, was not nearly as daring as Smithers and, despite his interest in the decadent Bodley Head writers, he exercised caution in his publishing activities. Inspired by the success that Lane and Heinemann had had in publishing quality books, Richards determined to establish himself as a quality commercial publisher. Taking a cue from Heinemann, Richards tried to attract best-sellers to his list in order to subsidize the unprofitable high art that he was committed to publishing and for which he wished to establish a wider audience.

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[2] For details of the poor sales of Smithers's publications see Nelson, *Publisher* 260.

Given Richards's desire to mediate between the claims of high art and the demands of the literary marketplace, it is perhaps not unsurprising that he attracted writers like Machen, Shiel, and Davidson, and whose own previous works were characterized by their combination of highbrow and popular elements. These writers were ideally suited to Richards's project in that they were capable of producing marketable high art.[3] Richards catered to an educated, arty but somewhat conservative middle- to upper middle-class readership, publishing mainly what Jefferson Hunter has called coterie novels (one of two forms of what he refers to as minor fiction, the other being best-selling novels) and the occasional best-seller. "Coterie authors," writes Hunter, "worked in strictly defined, highly conventional specialities addressed to an identifiable readership of enthusiasts" (47). Though Richards had best-selling authors like Edgar Wallace and Eden Philpotts on his lists, popular writers of this type often used Richards as a publisher of their sideline interests (Wallace's poems, Philpotts's poems and stories of antiquity), publishing their best-selling novels with other publishers. Richards's literary avant-gardism was an avant-gardism very much in the 1890s style and he was, therefore, an ardent supporter of the decadent writers of this period, publishing them throughout the Edwardian and Modernist periods. Generally speaking, he did not like the high Modernists, finding their work too difficult.

The rise of Richards and Smithers, publishers willing to take on the pariahs of the literary world in the wake of the Wilde scandal even as Lane, their hitherto most ardent supporter, abandoned them, meant that the situation was not as bleak as it might have seemed. Many writers flippantly joked about the situation for it reminded them quite forcibly of the important belief that formed the very basis of their artistic ideology: that the public was stubbornly hostile and blind to true art. Thus, expressing his intense admiration to Leonard Smithers for Pierre Louÿs's *Aphrodite* and his interest in translating it, Dowson remarked: "I suppose it would mean joining Oscar in his gardening operations in Reading Gaol" (Dowson, *Letters* 362). Ella D'Arcy, who performed editorial functions for the *Yellow Book*, also joked to Lane in the midst of the Wilde scandal, "I'm inclined to give up Art and Literature altogether, (since they seem inseparable from Decadence), and go back to the comfortably prosaic circles of suburban grocers from which I so (foolishly) came" (D'Arcy 19-20). In early June 1895, before Lane asked him to tone down *The Three Imposters*, Machen suggested that the publication of the book be delayed, but he did so with a humorous flair: "I have just been reading Mr. Quilter's very entertaining article ["The Gospel of Intensity"] in the *Contemporary*; and it seems to me, taking this and other literary events into consideration, that the present summer is likely to be somewhat unhealthy for *The Three Imposters*. There seems to me a rather severe attack of virtue abroad, and I should not be greatly surprised if a short act were to run through Parliament, bringing in the writing of literature as distinguished from twaddle as an offence within the purview of the Criminal Law Amendment Act" (Letter to John Lane, 5 June 1895).

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[3] It is, I think, significant that the more cautious Richards seems to have attracted the decadent writers of fiction (with the exception of Davidson) to his firm, whereas the more daring Smithers attracted decadent poets. Fiction writers as producers of a fairly popular genre, are far more affected by fluctuations in demand for their work than are poets who, except in a very few instances, do not sell in anywhere near the kind of numbers that would make them vulnerable to public disapproval. Symons, Yeats and Dowson were, therefore, in a better position to thumb their noses at the British public and to join the rebellious Smithers than were Machen, Shiel, and Egerton who opted for the more conservative Richards.

But these instances of levity masked what was, no doubt, serious consternation about the state of literature. For those who had hoped to raise British literature to the level of more advanced continental literature, the Wilde trial and the backlash against kinds of modernity in literature, now labelled "decadent," represented a serious setback. Whether or not writers thought of themselves as "decadent" or not, they nonetheless had to face the consequences of the term having been applied to them as they considered how best to manoeuvre themselves within the literary field at this precarious time, a time when many writers were rethinking their literary futures. Some believed that these consequences would be severe indeed. B. A. Crackanthorpe, mother of Hubert Crackanthorpe and writer in her own right, spoke in dire terms about the fate of the decadents in the aftermath of the Wilde trial, urging Lane to disassociate himself from those she referred to as the "living dead":

> of one thing I am certain. It is this--that if the YB [*Yellow Book*] is to prosper--to have the future which we all hope for it--true wisdom on the part of its owner lies in the avoiding--for some time to come--any

> contributors, men, or women, who belong markedly to the avowedly decadent school who have moulded themselves + their writings on the writings of people who are now the living dead--and must remain so. (Letter to John Lane [1895])

Crackanthorpe's comments are ironic given the fact that her own son's gritty realism had earned him an association in the minds of some with the decadent school, an association that would be confirmed by his suicide a year and a half later in November 1896. It remained to be seen whether any of those among the "living dead" would be able to rise phoenix-like from the ashes of the overwhelmingly hostile environment depicted in Crackanthorpe's letter to Lane.

III

Decadence and the Edwardian and Modernist Literary Fields

The influence of the Wilde scandal and the concomitant backlash against, not only decadence, but any literature considered "advanced" or "modern" on the subsequent development of literature cannot, I think, be stressed enough. Certainly, as I intend to show, it had quite a profound effect on writers who had been associated with decadence like Shiel, Machen, Dowson, and Davidson. In addition, the changing literary climate that was created in the wake of the scandal even affected writers not so closely linked with decadence. Thomas Hardy, disgusted at the reception his *Jude the Obscure* had received, resolved, in 1895, to abandon fiction writing. Other writers reacted somewhat less drastically. H. G. Wells, for example, whose 1890s output has been characterized by Bernard Bergonzi as decadent and *fin de siècle*, began to produce more socially engaged fiction in the new century (Batchelor 119). Similarly, Arnold Bennett, who had deliberately set out to write an "artistic" novel in 1895, *A Man from the North*, just as deliberately set out to make himself into a popular novelist in 1898. Arguments have indeed been made for viewing the fall of Wilde as the beginning of the Edwardian period. As John Batchelor notes, "[t]he fall of Wilde signalled the retreat of aestheticism and Edwardian literature can be seen to be casting about for its models and imperatives" (2). Other cases have been made for different dates including 1897, 1900, and 1901.[4] But whichever of these we take as the defining date, there is no doubt that the backlash against decadence that accompanied Wilde's fall helped shape Edwardian literature.

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[4] Osbert Burdett, an early twentieth-century literary critic, declared 1900, the year of Wilde's death as the beginning of a new literary age (Hunter 13). Jefferson Hunter dates the period more literally according to the period of Edward's reign January 1901 to May

Scholars have broadly characterized the literature of the period as rich in its range of subject matter but weak in formal innovation. Hunter, for example, argues that the "two most salient facts about Edwardian fiction" are its "thematic adventurousness" and its "formal conservatism" (viii). Similarly, the editors of *Edwardian Fiction: An Oxford Companion* describe the Edwardian literary period as one of "generic diversity" (x). Certainly the novel at this period is regarded as the dominant literary form. Poetry of this period has very low standing canonically, the Edwardian and Georgian poets being largely overshadowed by the "modernists" that would follow them. The "sheer generic diversity" of the novel in this period was a result of the continuing expansion of the reading public which had begun in the late nineteenth century (Kemp, Mitchell, Trotter x, xvii). This reading public was catered to by publishers but also by an ever-expanding periodical industry dominated by men like Alfred Harmsworth and Charles Pearson who regularly created new periodicals for specific niche markets most of which published short stories and longer serialized fiction.

Increasingly, then, writers gained a keen "awareness of fine demarcations of genre and sub-genre" (Kemp, Mitchell, Trotter xvii). This increasing awareness of the existence of niche readerships encouraged the development of what Hunter calls "coterie fiction"—fiction characterized by "highly conventional specialities addressed to an identifiable readership of enthusiasts" like detective fiction, fantasy, the tale of terror, and the historical novel (47). Similarly this awareness of the multiplicity of readerships encouraged writers to experiment with different genres in what amounted to what Kemp, Mitchell, and Trotter describe as the "generic promiscuity" of many Edwardian writers. The tendency towards generic innovation over stylistic innovation must, in part, have owed its origins to the association of an interest in stylistic matters with the aesthetes and decadents who were now out of favour.

Though certainly there were writers like Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford who engaged in formal experimentation in the Edwardian period, there were risks

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1910 (vii), though he acknowledges there is a strong case for claiming 1897 as the beginning of the Edwardian literary period (155).

involved in such a venture. Well into the Edwardian period, it was still not uncommon for works to be criticized in the same vehemently moral terms as they were in 1895 and Nordau's claims about the degeneracy of artists became a popular stereotype even though his ideas had been discredited. Terms like "morbid," "decadent" and "degenerate," what William Greenslade has called the "labelling system of the nineties"--still carried significant critical weight in the Edwardian period, and to have one's work described in such terms was undesirable (131).[5] In general in the Edwardian period, preciosity of style was a sign of decadence, of art-for-art's sake, and increasingly Edwardian literature was taken up with contemporary social issues. In this respect Edwardian literature differed radically from the aesthetic and decadent fiction of the *fin de siècle* which was guided by art-for-art's sake principles. At the same time, of course, Edwardian fiction developed from the socially conscious fiction of the *fin de siècle* which became dominant after the deliberate attempts to eradicate decadent fiction.

While writers like Machen and Shiel had demonstrated a degree of commitment to high artistic and decadent stylistic principles in the 1890s, their work had also significantly engaged with popular genres. The generic diversity that characterized the Edwardian period had begun to manifest itself in the 1890s and Machen and Shiel had both contributed significantly to the modern development of popular genres like the detective story and the modern romance/adventure story which were taking a different shape as the new century approached. But where they had tried to negotiate between the two categories to produce popular and artistic works, the conditions of the literary field were seemingly inimical to such mediations. How, as writers formerly aligned with aestheticism, decadence, and art-for-art's sake, would Machen and Shiel respond to the backlash against preciosity of style that characterized the Edwardian literary field, a field strongly invested in fiction focused on contemporary social issues? Would they continue to try to mediate between the realms of high art and popular fiction or would they choose one at the exclusion of the other--high art over popular or vice versa?

With the advent of a "Modernist" sensibility regarding literature, a sensibility which defined itself in opposition to Edwardianism, writers who had been involved in the

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[5] Greenslade discusses the use of these terms in the reception of the Post-Impressionist exhibition of 1910-11 (129-33).

1890s decadent movement were confronted with a new context within which to position themselves. Though I say the context was new, in many respects the issues were all too familiar to the former decadents in that they had initiated much of what would be taken up by the Modernists. The Modernist disdain for the masses, its interest in subjectivity, in "difficulty" and in the problems inherent in language as a form of expression had all been concerns of the decadents of the 1890s and had been represented, in various ways, in the decadent fiction of the *fin de siècle*. For example, decadent fiction explored the subjectivity of morbid types as in Robert Hichens's *Imaginative Man* (1896) and Arthur Machen's *Hill of Dreams* (wr. 1895-97; publ. 1907). Similarly, writers like Machen had treated the inability of language to express certain states of mind in his horror fiction of the 1890s. And finally, the decadents, though more willing perhaps than modernists to cater to the popular audience that they disdained, also employed difficulty or obscurity as a means of rendering their work more challenging. Shiel's *Shapes in the Fire* (1896) comes to mind here with its linguistic playfulness and its obscure historical and cultural allusions. In a manner that anticipated the reception of T. S. Eliot's *Wasteland*, the critics of the 1890s expressed wonder at the text's difficulties and remarked on its inaccessibility to the general reader. The *Weekly Sun*, for example, declared, "[t]he volume will prove a curious intellectual exercise to certain circles, and will become suitable for general reading about the time when the British workman takes to the Upanishads or the differential calculus for pastime. Mr. Shiel is too clever by a thousand degrees for the sober, burden-bearing portions of the world" (2). Even the more highbrow *Academy* complained of his "extravagance of expression," "liberal coinage of impossible and ugly words," and his "ostentation of occult and intricate lore" and pronounced Shiel "incomprehensible . . . at his best" and guilty of the "sheerest impertinence . . . at his worst (43).

Though the modernists admittedly engaged with issues of subjectivity, language, and difficulty differently and probably, to some minds, in a more "advanced" manner than the *fin de siècle* writers, these areas were similar points of interest which, in their zeal to fashion themselves as self-originating, the modernists obscured. The modernists were as invested in disavowing Victorianism as they were Edwardianism and this included the *fin de siècle*. In breaking with Roger Fry, Wyndham Lewis scorned him for the "greenery-yallery" tendency of his art, an insult that linked Fry with outmoded *fin de siècle* aestheticism and decadence (Levenson 123). Later in his poem "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," Pound would similarly denounce the achievements of the men of the 1890s. The high modernist disdain for the older generation of Edwardians and Victorians extended to those of his own generation sympathetic to Victorian and Edwardian literary values--those like anti-modernists J. C. Squire and Edward Marsh who used their influence in the literary field to defend traditional writing and to speak out against the new, experimental modernism.

Literary history has largely obscured the vast array of literary and intellectual activity of the war and post-war period in its privileging of specifically "Modernist" productions and producers. The literary activities of Squire, Marsh and others indicate that there was much more going on in this period and that there was a strong traditionalist presence in the literary field of the time. In the case of *fin de siècle* trends, what was once "modern," "new" and "avant-garde," had now become traditional, partly because of a modernist need to disavow their literary forbears but also because of an anti-modernist desire to be traditional rather than radical. For example, in the first issue of the largely anti-Modernist periodical the *London Mercury*, Squire, who edited the magazine, attacked high Modernism as "dirty living and muddled thinking" and as "fungoid growths of feeble pretentious impostors," charges that sound much like those levelled at the decadents in the 1890s (qtd. in J. Symons 114). To those like Squire and Marsh, however, 1890s decadence was classic and traditional in comparison with the high Modernist school. This more traditionalist emphasis dominated periodicals like the *Mercury* and also exhibited itself in the publications of numerous publishers of the time, publishers like Grant Richards who had a distaste for the new modernist avant-gardism.

That *fin de siècle* decadence had emerged as the new traditionalism is further suggested by the wealth of 1890s memoirs and histories published from just before the first world war and well into the second world war period. Chief among these publications were W.G. Blakie Murdoch's *The Renaissance of the Nineties* (1910), Holbrook Jackson's *The Eighteen Nineties* (1913), Robert Sherard's *The Real Oscar Wilde* (1911), and Bernard Muddiman's *Men of the Nineties* (1920) and memoirs by the likes of Richard Le Gallienne (1926), Victor Plarr (1914), Edgar Jepson (1937), Yeats

(1922), Frank Harris (1918), Lord Alfred Douglas (1914, 1932, 1939) and many, many more. These publications catered to what Theodore Wratislaw, a minor "minor" poet of the 1890s, referred to as a "thriving interest in the products of the 1890s" when he offered up his memoirs to Elkin Mathews in 1914 (Letter to Elkin Mathews, 13 March 1914).

The 1890s nostalgia of this period may have been prompted by a number of things: during the years of the "Great War" and in the years between it and the second world war, the decadent 1890s may have stood out as a simpler and more romantic age, much in the same way as the Edwardian era seemed to have been one long country house garden party from the post-war perspective; it may also have been that there was something glamorous in the concept of artistic martyrdom in contrast to the war which was killing so many young men; or, perhaps, the glamour of the bohemian artistic life was appealing at a time when fiction may have seemed more commercialized than ever;[6] or, quite simply, this nostalgia may have been part of the larger reaction against the emerging high modernist sensibility which denigrated the achievements of the 1890s men.

The existence of this formidable oppositional presence in an age that has come to be so strongly characterized by the work and ideas of "modernist" writers casts new light on the anti-1890s sentiments of writers like Ezra Pound who, in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (1919), attacks Victor Plarr in the guise of "M. Verog" for being "out of step with the decade, / Detached from his contemporaries, / Neglected by the young" because of his interest in 1890s culture (7.17-20). Today, with the institutionalization of high modernism these lines register differently than they did when Pound wrote them. While Pound's canonical status assures that we concur with his criticism of this unknown poet, at the time he wrote the poem, Pound was desperately asserting his cultural authority in a battle which was very much ongoing. The poem functions as a farewell to London, a place where he felt unappreciated within the literary field. The traditionalists and the 1890s writers he writes against, writers who are largely forgotten to us now, were a dominant presence in a field where high modernists found it necessary to set about creating their own venues for publication--the small presses and the "little magazines" of the period.

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[6] Murdoch, for example, writing in 1911 praised the decadents for fighting "Philistia" (82). "[O]ne is prone," he adds, "to think of these bygone workers with a devotion impossible to offer the rising artists of to-day. . . . [The] Promethean fire waits to be rekindled in English aesthetics. . . . it is a little difficult to believe that . . . there will rise anything quite so precious as the renaissance of the nineties" (83).

Though the decadents and the contemporaries of the high modernists who were sympathetic with the Edwardians and Victorians have come down in a literary history that privileges "high" modernism as non-entities or losers in the battle for cultural authority, at the time of the battle this outcome was not a given. If Pound and other high modernists had disdain for the decadents and the traditionalists of their own generation who revered them, the decadents who continued to participate in the literary field in the Edwardian and Modernist periods were equally disdainful of the modernists. Neither Shiel nor Machen, for example, apparently read the works of the modernists. In 1924 Machen expressed his disdain for modern fiction in a letter to Munson Havens: "When I do read a modern novel," he declared, I often make two reflections. Firstly: 'How very clever'; secondly: 'And yet this can never last'" (*A Few Letters* 27). For his part, Shiel believed the men of the nineties to be "wittier" than the moderns and his literary preferences among living writers were far from modernist (Shiel, letter to Edgar Meyerstein, 29 August 1935): his favourite playwright was G. B. Shaw, his favourite poet, John Gawsworth, and his favourite novelists, William Somerset Maugham and Margaret Kennedy (Morse, *Works* 435).

Those decadents like Machen and Shiel who were still actively engaged in the literary scene in the modernist period were alienated by the "new" modern and prided themselves on their anti-intellectualism, distinguishing themselves as dilettantes in opposition to the intellectual moderns. The difference in the tenor of intellectualism might well be accounted for by the fact that while the decadents were largely self-educated, the high modernists, particularly the Americans like Eliot and Pound, were virtually all university educated. And while the decadents' self-culture constituted a form of avant-garde highbrowness in its own day, by high-modernist standards this self-culture was anti-intellectual. The antipathy of the decadents of a previous literary élite for the modernists indicates that the modernist period was not simply about the new rejecting the old. Rather, it was a two-sided affair with the surviving "old" capable of an equally sharp condemnation of the "new." Both sides felt at times threatened, at times triumphant, in the context of a richly diverse and divisive literary field.[7]

The literary fields of the second half of the 1890s, and of the Edwardian and Modernist periods offered distinct challenges for decadents who had been schooled in the literary field of the late 1880s and early 1890s. Though issues of readership, authorship, professionalism, ethics, aesthetics, high art, popular art, and economics were still central in establishing certain forms of artistic identity, the changing contexts altered the way these issues were used in positioning writers within the field. In the immediate aftermath of the Wilde trial, the backlash against decadence seemed to force writers, particularly decadents, to abandon the artistic principles they had been committed to and to conform to the demand for a healthy national literature. This overt attempt to eradicate literary decadence resulted in an Edwardian fiction largely characterized by a generic rather than formal adventurousness as the suspicion against preciosity of style associated with decadence continued to dominate. Finally, though the Modernist period, which saw an aggressive promotion of stylistic and high art principles by writers associated with high modernism, may have seemed a welcoming place for those writers who had espoused high art principles in the 1890s, the period presented other kinds of challenges for the decadents who participated in the literary field at this time. For even if the decadents shared with the modernists certain basic artistic principles, the distinction between the old and the new and a traditional and a radical concept of high art marked the difference between the old "new" art of decadence and the new "new" art of modernism.

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[7] Marysa Demoor explores some aspects of the reciprocal antagonisms of modernists and anti-modernists and of the old avant-garde (Edwardians and *fin de siècle* writers) and the new avant-garde in an article which focuses on Lucy Clifford, a popular turn-of-the century writer. Demoor argues that the examination of Clifford's correspondence from 1919-1929 illustrates "a painful period of transition, a handing over of the symbolic capital by one generation to another" and her article is an attempt to view modernism, not from the point of view of its members, but from the point of view of the previous generation (234).

Part 3
The Decadents after Decadence: Demystifying the Tragic Generation
Chapter 2
Case Studies

Though Arthur Machen's *Hill of Dreams* figures the death of the decadent in both literal and figurative terms as a response to what he saw as a hostile climate for the artist in the wake of the Wilde trial, the real-life decadents that I have been discussing throughout this thesis did not suffer the same fate. They certainly did not literally die, but neither did they figuratively die, a fate so often allotted them in literary histories of decadence in which their doomed tragic (and decadent, as is often implied) lives overshadow their highly productive engagements in the literary field. The emphasis on decadents as "burdened by the malady of the soul's unrest," as "restless and tragic figures thirst[ing] so much for life, and for the life of the hour, that they put the cup to their lips and drained it in one deep draught" distorts a fuller picture of decadents (Jackson 131). In this chapter, I construct an alternative narrative that examines more closely the post-decadent era lives of the decadents who have been central to my study. On the one hand, I take up decidedly non-tragic decadents--Arthur Machen and M. P. Shiel who cannot be contained within the tragic generation model. It is perhaps no coincidence that these writers have been erased from histories of decadence, histories which often insist on a correspondence between a decadent literary practice and a decadent and tragic existence. On the other hand, I take up so-called tragic figures like Ernest Dowson and John Davidson in order to balance the image of them as doomed, tragic and isolated artist-martyr figures with one that accounts for their productive engagement in the literary field, as they sought to redefine themselves in the post-decadent moment.

In my examination of the post-decadent careers of these writers I will focus on immediate and longer term issues. In the more immediate context of the aftermath of the Wilde trial I am concerned with how these writers adapted to the backlash against decadence that characterized the field between 1895 and 1900. How did the position of these writers within the literary field alter and/or to what extent did they actively re-position themselves within the field? Did they defiantly persist in promoting decadence or did they alter their literary style to accord with the new literary conservatism? Were they forced ultimately to choose between art and the marketplace where heretofore they had demonstrated a willingness to mediate between the two? Or, had the Wilde scandal and the ensuing backlash against decadent and other forms of élite art firmly entrenched what Andreas Huyssen has called the "great divide" between popular and élite culture?

In the longer term, I am interested in how these writers adapted themselves to the conditions of the Edwardian (in the case of Davidson, Machen, and Shiel) and Modernist (in the case of Machen and Shiel, Davidson having died in 1909) literary fields. How did their concerns about readership, authorship, professionalism, aesthetics, high art, popular art, and journalism carry over into the changing contexts of the Edwardian and Modernist periods and what new challenges and issues did they face? In the case of those writers who were dead in one or both of these periods (Davidson in the former case; Dowson in the latter), I examine how they figured posthumously in the literary field and how their reputations as "decadents" functioned in the mythologization and glamorization of the *fin de siècle*. As I have suggested in the previous chapter, this mythologization and glamorization of the *fin de siècle* engendered a thriving nostalgia industry which served as an ironic contrast to the high modernism of the period which was characterized by an obsession with the new and a disdain for the old.

I

Ernest Dowson (1867-1900): The "Dowson Legend" as Fiction of Decadence

Of all the British poets and the writers of the 1890s it is Dowson who has come to best typify the stereotypical decadent, the decadent of decadents. The stereotype, argue Flower and Maas, characterizes the decadents as "idle penurious, drunken, promiscuous, living with [their] head[s] in a cloud of artistic ambition but doing little towards its achievement, tempted towards drugs and perversion, often addicted to them, producing exquisitely fashioned small works, but doomed, after material failure, to an early death" (3). As Flower and Maas argue, however, Dowson's letters do much to contest this image of Dowson the decadent. I have made use of these letters, for example, in order to demonstrate that far from being the martyr artist described by Yeats in the *Trembling of the Veil* as a poet who "made it a matter of conscience to turn from every kind of money-making that prevented good writing," Dowson had, on the contrary, shown himself willing to mediate between the claims of high art and the claims of the marketplace, particularly in his collaborative novels with Arthur Moore (qtd. in Flower and Maas 4). In pointing to Dowson's more commercial literary pursuits I do not mean to undermine Dowson's artistic integrity, but rather to demonstrate the complexity of the literary field and of writers' attempts to position themselves within it. My aim here is not so much to redress any apparent injustice done to Dowson by what has come to be called the "Dowson Legend," but rather to suggest how this legend, myth, or "fiction" came to be constructed in the aftermath of the Wilde scandal as Dowson manoeuvred within the literary field and, additionally, after Dowson's death in 1900 as he was positioned in the literary fields of the Edwardian and Modernist eras.

As I have argued, Dowson was not immune to the lures of fame and fortune though it is true that, as his career got under way, his interest in writing shockers and his desire for achieving a popular success by appealing to what he termed the "many headed Beast" seems to have waned (*Letters* 151). Certainly these interests are no longer represented in his letters after 1893. Though Dowson would complete one more collaborative effort with Arthur Moore--*Adrian Rome*, published in 1899--Dowson was increasingly taken up with the "higher" artistic pursuits of the literary élite, focusing his attentions on poetry and short stories even before the Wilde scandal led other writers like Machen and Shiel to abandon their attempts to attract a wider audience. Between these interests, the translation work he engaged in to make money, and the work he undertook at his father's dry dock, his time was well occupied and it would be Moore who would do much of the work to complete their *Adrian Rome*.

From 1892 to early 1895 Dowson contributed to two Rhymers Club poetry collections and worked on a collection of short stories, both published by Mathews and Lane. In addition, Dowson did translation work for Alexander Teixera de Mattos (Zola's *La Terre* and Louis Couperus's *Majesty*). From mid-1895 on however, Dowson's manoeuvrings within the literary field became more limited as he became exclusively associated with Smithers (except in the case of *Adrian Rome*, his collaborative novel with Arthur Moore, which was published by Methuen), the publisher whose business had been given a kick-start by the backlash against decadence that coincided with the Wilde scandal. Dowson's exclusive allegiance to Smithers was perhaps more personal than that of some of the other young writers like Yeats who gravitated towards Smithers in the aftermath of the Wilde trials, seeing him as a comrade-in-arms against British philistinism. As Nelson notes, "Dowson was headed for disaster in 1895 when Smithers entered his life" (*Publisher* 226). His parents had died--his father a probable suicide, his mother a definite suicide--and he was ill and poor. Smithers provided Dowson with emotional support and was also extremely generous to Dowson as a publisher. Smithers adopted the rather unorthodox practice of paying Dowson a weekly salary of thirty shillings for whatever work Dowson could produce (mostly translation work) in addition to the royalties he paid on the writer's own work (Plarr 99). Dowson's gratitude to Smithers for his generosity and friendship led him to break a contract with Elkin Mathews--who had anticipated publishing a volume of Dowson's verses-- in order to allow Smithers to publish it. Explaining his motives to friend Arthur Moore in February 1896, Dowson wrote, "Smithers was so very keen about them, & I was so anxious to do anything I could for him in return for the innumerable services he has done me, that I could not but *poser* the good Mathews *en lapin*" (*Letters* 342).[1]

Smithers was certainly very generous with Dowson at a time when Dowson would likely have had difficulty getting published anywhere else. Dowson's association with Smithers, however, had consequences for his positioning within the literary field. The translation work that Smithers provided for Dowson to help him out of his dire economic circumstances was essentially hack work and sometimes wasted hack work for Smithers did not always have the capital to publish all that Dowson translated for him. In addition, Smithers's publications sold quite poorly and were subject to scurrilous abuse in the press. "Oftenest," as Vincent O'Sullivan recalled of the press reactions to Smithers's publications, "there was not even a pretext of impartial judgement or of merely trying to understand. It was just welting and socks in the jaw" (118).[2] The extreme hostility towards Smithers's publications was likely due to Smithers's reputation as a purveyor of erotic and pornographic books. Though probably not public knowledge, such information certainly circulated in the literary field, causing even sympathetic members of the literary avant-garde to be wary of Smithers.[3] Dowson's reputation, along with those of other writers that Smithers published, suffered, then, from Smithers's low status within the literary field, a status that did nothing to recuperate the reputations of the decadents and other modern writers who turned to him in the aftermath of the Wilde scandal.

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[1] *poser en lapin*: to stand someone up. Dowson's grammar is incorrect here. The correct construction is "poser un lapin à quelqu'un."

[2] O'Sullivan himself was on the receiving end of one of these abusive reviews. In his case the review consisted of a single line: "What is a fanatical nose?," the reviewer asked dismissively (O'Sullivan 115).

But if, as Dowson told John Gray, he had gone to Smithers primarily out of friendship and because of the "magnificent terms" offered him and not for the rebellious reasons proffered by Yeats and the other decadents, he certainly did not shy away from a provocative public stance (*Letters* 337). Dowson was one of the few writers and artists, for example, to come out publicly in support of Wilde by attending the trial.[4] Furthermore, Dowson embraced his vilified status, writing to Symons in the summer of 1896 regarding the reception of his recently published *Verses*, "I foresee that I am to dispute the honour with you of being the most abused versifier in England, and am flattered at the position" (*Letters* 372). Exiled away in France where he had gone in September 1895 never to make a permanent home in England again, Dowson certainly took an interest in his reputation in England. If he himself did not actively set about publicizing his own decadent artistic persona, he nonetheless sanctioned the representations put about by his decadent friends among the literary élite.

In particular, Dowson endorsed Symons's portrait of him which appeared in the *Savoy* in August 1896. In this lurid and sensational portrait, Symons constructs an image of Dowson as the quintessential decadent. Describing Dowson as having "the face of a demoralized Keats," Symons goes on to discuss Dowson's experimentations with hashish and his love of drink ("A Literary Causerie" 91, 92). Symons ends the piece with an image of the solipsistic decadent poet:

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[3] A letter from Max Beerbohm to Will Rothenstein from March 1896 confirms Smithers's poor reputation in critical literary circles and suggests that the press was indeed out to get Smithers. "Critics," he wrote to Rothenstein, "would naturally be upon a keen scent over any quarry set loose by Smithers" (qtd. in Nelson, *Publisher* 122). Even those that published with Smithers were wary of his association with pornography. Yeats, for example, disliked Smithers, calling him a "scandalous person" (qtd. in Nelson, *Publisher* 72).

[4] According to Robert Sherard, he and Dowson were the only literary friends of Wilde on the day of the sentencing at Wilde's second trial (Adams 99). Max Beerbohm was also, however, a strong supporter of Wilde and he appeared publicly at the first trial (Cecil 120-22).

> So the wilder wanderings began, and a gradual slipping into deeper and steadier waters of oblivion. That curious love of the sordid, so common an affectation of the modern decadent, and with him so expressively genuine, grew upon him, and dragged him into yet more sorry corners of a life which was never exactly "gay" to him. And now, indifferent to most things, in the shipwrecked quietude of a sort of self-exile, he is living, I believe, somewhere on a remote foreign sea-coast. . . . [In his verses] I find . . . all the fever and turmoil and the unattained dreams of a life which has itself had much of the swift, disastrous, and suicidal energy of genius. ("A Literary Causerie" 93)

Though Dowson took exception to some of the details that presented "too lurid" an account of him and asked Symons to make a few revisions (not all of which Symons made), overall, he approved of Symons's representation of him when he read it in the summer of 1896 (*Letters* 371). To this extent, Dowson was complicit in the construction of at least one instance of what I have been calling the "fictions of decadence." R. K. R. Thornton argues similarly declaring that "Dowson [was] striving for a mythical status which Symons captures" (*Decadent Dilemma* 83). Of course Dowson recognized that he was hardly the kind of lonely exile Symons described, being very actively engaged, even from far away, in the English literary scene. But the representation, insofar as it captured what Machen and Moore had described as the "soul" of the artist in discussions of their own fictions of decadence (*Confessions of a Young Man* and the *Hill of Dreams*), appealed to Dowson at a symbolic level. In his letter to Symons, Dowson, after all, concurred wholeheartedly with Symons's description of his "swift disastrous, and suicidal energy" (*Letters* 372). He even expanded on it by aligning himself with Verlaine, another poet who he claimed was characterised by this quality, a quality which, as Dowson wrote Symons, ultimately "destroyed" him (*Letters* 372).

Symons's portrait, which was revised and reissued in a number of forms over the following years, was largely responsible for creating what would come to be called the "Dowson myth" or the "Dowson legend." This portrait formed the basis of his obituary of Dowson in 1900 as well as the introduction to a collected edition of the *Poems of*

Ernest Dowson which, by Bodley Head standards, and certainly by Dowson's, was a popular success. The collection went through an edition about every two years from 1905, when it was first published, until 1917, always with Symons's sensational account of Dowson to perpetuate the legend. This account had particular currency, especially from 1910 on into the war years when the nostalgia for the *fin de siècle* period that I have described previously resulted in a series of histories and memoirs of the period. Dowson, in large part thanks to Symons's account of him, was the most visible of these figures, but there were many more that seemed to confirm the notion of the "tragic generation" that was being formulated in these years: Hubert Crackanthorpe, a probable suicide, in 1896, aged 26; Beardsley, dead at age 26 of tuberculosis in 1898 (like Dowson); Lionel Johnson, dead at age 35 in 1902; Francis Adams, suicide at age 31 in 1893. Davidson's suicide in 1909, though he was by no means young at the time, and Symons's emotional breakdown in 1908 which led to a two-year confinement only served to strengthen this image of the decadent artist, an image that led Murdoch to declare in his 1910 study of the decadent movement: "It is nature's law that the artist should be unhappy, and should succumb to the philistine and the commercialist" (76). Though Symons's depiction of the more lurid elements of Dowson's decadence was refuted in books and articles by a number of Dowson's friends including Edgar Jepson, Victor Plarr, and W. R. Thomas, these writers did little to dispel the aura of martyrdom surrounding Dowson.[5] Perhaps Dowson would have refuted it too if he had lived on past 1900. Certainly that seems to have been the pattern of other writers associated with *fin de siècle* decadence like Arthur Machen as they sought to establish a position for themselves in the altered literary field of the twentieth century.

In 1896, however, the image of the decadent artist as Symons portrayed him in his description of Dowson accorded precisely with the kind of idealized representations constructed and fictionalized by those young aspiring artists of the period from Moore's *Confessions* of 1888 to Machen's *Hill of Dreams* which he was working on when

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[5] Jepson refutation of the Dowson myth appeared in the *Academy* in 1907 in an article entitled "The Real Ernest Dowson" and later in his *Memories of a Victorian*; Plarr contested the myth in his memoirs of Ernest Dowson, while Thomas's defence appeared in an article in the *Nineteenth Century*, "Ernest Dowson at Oxford" (1928).

Symons's article appeared. This representation of the decadent artist at odds with society and contemporary social mores gained added currency in the wake of the Wilde trial when, more than ever, these artists sensed an insuperable divide between themselves and the public. In this climate, it became more necessary than ever to assert a symbolic representation of the decadent artist over a material reality. Far more glamorous and beneficial to the cause of art is the representation of Dowson as misunderstood poet and exile than as the writer actively engaged in the literary culture of his time and full of ideas for future projects, the Dowson that we find in his collected letters. Dowson, as I have said, fully participated in this sensationalistic construction of himself. Strategically, it functioned well for Dowson in establishing his literary posterity after his death. Symons's portrait of the decadent coupled with the seemingly corroborating death of the poet at the age of thirty-three made Dowson something of a best-seller and popularized him as the posterboy of *fin de siècle* Bohemian decadence. Whereas his previous works had sold a few hundred copies, the Bodley Head *Poems of Ernest Dowson* sold thousands in the Edwardian and Modernist periods. Through his death and his mythologization as the quintessential decadent, Dowson had garnered the kind of symbolic capital that translates itself into economic capital and had achieved the critical and popular acclaim he had desired at the time of his early literary endeavours. The irony is, of course, that he had to die in order to achieve this goal.

Though Dowson achieved a certain posthumous fame in certain quarters, he was regarded with more ambivalence by the emerging literary élite of high modernist writers. Though much has been made of the debt of the modernist poets to decadent poets of the 1890s like Dowson, this debt was, for the most part, a late acknowledged one. It was only once modernism had firmly established itself institutionally that such debts were acknowledged. Whereas in 1924 Eliot had claimed, in a letter to Pound, that the "poets of the nineties" had no influence on him because he had "never read any of these people until it was too late for me to get anything out of them," by the mid-1930s Eliot spoke differently of these poets (qtd. in Ricks 394).

In the period when modernism was establishing itself and its practitioners were trying to obtain cultural authority, it was more important to discredit these poets in order to promote a high modernist sense of originality and newness. Writing in 1915, Pound criticized the poets of the 1890s for their "muzziness" and it was Lionel Johnson, not Dowson, whom he declared an exception to this rule ("Lionel Johnson" 363). Whereas Dowson and the other decadents were characterized by their "muzziness," appealing only "to the fluffy, unsorted imagination of adolescence," Johnson was characterized by his "hatred of amateurishness," which appealed to the "more hardened passion and intellect of early middle-age. . . . [His poems] hold their own now . . . because of that effect of neatness and hardness" ("Lionel Johnson" 363, 367). In a similar vein, A. R. Orage singled out Dowson for criticism in the modernist organ the *New Age* taking an even harsher view than Pound of the decadents. Critiquing the tendency of equating "genius with disaster and suicide" which he claims is "an incentive to the little artists to trade on their neurosis," Orage goes on to describe Dowson not as adolescent as Pound had done but rather as "infantil[e]" (174): "Dowson was not ripe, but . . . rotten. He remained in the cradle sucking sensations long after he should have been out in the world creating sensations" (175).

In the period of high modernism, then, many modernists largely disavowed their debt to Dowson and other poets of the 1890s, establishing themselves as hard, neat, and mature in contrast to the muzzy, soft, adolescent and even infantile decadents of the earlier generation. This disavowal is all the more understandable keeping in mind the esteem with which poets like Dowson were held by Georgian poets like Rupert Brooke whom modernists were also anxious to establish themselves in opposition to. For the high modernists, Dowson's popularity within the period served as a mark against him and the steady flow of editions of Dowson poems from 1905 to 1917 initiated no response (apart from Orage's scathing commentary) on the part of this literary élite to embrace or critically acclaim this 1890s poet who would later be acknowledged as a forerunner of the modernist school.

II

John Davidson (1857-1909): A Decadent *Malgré Lui*

As was the case with Dowson, it was Davidson's disappearance and death that garnered him more publicity than he had ever had before. His disappearance was widely reported in the newspapers and his cause was even taken up with characteristic publicity-seeking fervour by Marie Corelli.[6] Similarly, his situation at the time of the Wilde trial somewhat paralleled Dowson's. Like Dowson, Davidson had already begun to distance himself from the Bodley Head decadents even before the Wilde trial altered the possible positionings for writers within the literary field. A year before this event, in April 1894, Davidson had expressed in a letter to Robert Bridges his disgust and contempt for the Bodley Head coterie whom he referred to as "new women who wear their sexes on their sleeves" and "new men who are sexless" (*Selected Poems* 182). But, in fact, Davidson's association with decadence had always been somewhat tenuous anyway. While he shared with the decadents a stated disdain for commercialism, a disgust with philistinism, and an interest in an impressionistic aesthetic and unorthodox subject matter, his suspicion of refinement and cosmopolitanism and his "delight in" what Yeats called "all that seemed healthy, popular and bustling" aligned him ideologically with counter-decadents like W. E. Henley and Rudyard Kipling (Yeats 317). Yet, as Townsend argues, "he persisted in the uneasy relationship" with the decadents "partly from an ungovernable inclination to imitate and thereby capture the literary market, partly from an ingenuous notion that all rebels had the same aims as he" (178-79).

Davidson's alliance, then, was unconsciously strategic in that it was sustained and justified by his belief that he and the decadents shared a common cause. Certainly such forced allegiances and the sustaining justifications were not uncommon in the literary field at the time. Yeats, for example, rationalized his association with Smithers, a man he despised, by invoking a similar argument. "Outlaws," he declared, "whether they have offended through their virtues or their vices, soon discover that if they do not support one another no one else will" (qtd. in Nelson, *Publisher* 61). But for Davidson, the uneasy relationship with the decadents had begun to cloy, as I have suggested above, well before the Wilde trial. In particular, Davidson's expression of disgust for his fellow Bodleians went hand in hand with a denunciation of the fundamentally commercial nature of London literary life and of the Bodleian coterie. Thus, in the same April 1894 letter in which he denounces his fellow Bodleians, Davidson expresses his envy of Bridges's

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[6] For an account of the sensation caused by Davidson's disappearance see Townsend 1-28.

"unsullied . . . singing robes" (*Selected Poems* 182). Previously, a belief in the validity of the aims of the decadents had provided justification for Davidson's potentially profitable association with the decadents; now, at least insofar as he is representing himself to a poet whom he regards as a commercially disinterested "master in the craft," Davidson's sense of the shallowness of the coterie accompanies a sense of shame regarding his sullied robes (*Selected Poems* 182).

Davidson was more uncomfortable with mediating between the claims of high art and the claims of the literary marketplace than were younger artists like Dowson and he preferred to maintain a sharp distinction between high literary work and hack work. In 1895 Davidson told friend William McCormick that he was attempting to "unsully" his own robes by dropping his hack work altogether (what he called "reviewing etc.") in order to focus entirely on his poetry: in other words, his productions at the high artistic pole of the literary field (*Selected Poems* 187). Among the hack work Davidson dropped in 1895 was novel-writing.[7] The novel was a genre which, as I have argued in an earlier chapter, lent itself most easily to the mediation between high and popular art and Davidson's novels--*The North Wall* (1885; reprinted as *A Practical Novelist* [1891]), *Baptist Lake* (1894), *Perfervid* (1890), and *Earl Lavender* (1895)--had demonstrated in varying degrees his willingness to try to create works that were both popular and artistic. Certainly the inability of his novels to achieve either a popular or critical success figured in Davidson's abandonment of the genre. Since they were regarded by him primarily as money-making enterprises and they did not make money, he had no desire to continue to produce them.

Though Davidson was not so much influenced by the Wilde trial in his decision to commit himself to his high artistic work since he had undertaken to do so in February 1895, a letter to McCormick written in April 1895 reveals the degree to which Davidson was not only touched by Wilde's fate but also viewed it as a tragedy in more general terms for the artistic community. In the letter, Davidson quotes from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Haunted Palace," a poem which describes the downfall of Porphyrogene, a king who rules over a beautiful kingdom in a golden age and in whose palace are "Echoes whose sweet duty / Was but to sing, / In voices of surpassing beauty, / The wit and wisdom of their king." Davidson, figuring Wilde as Porphyrogene, cites the last two stanzas of the poem which describe the king's defeat at the hands of "evil things" and the occupation of the Palace by "a hideous throng." The poem, then, in its representation of a great king and his "singing" followers at the mercy of "evil things" functions as an apt allegory for the situation of the decadents in the wake of the Wilde scandal when they felt, more than ever, vulnerable to the philistinism of the British public.

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[7] After 1896, when two volumes of his short stories were published--*Mrs Armstrong's and Other Circumstances* and *The Pilgrimage of Strongsoul and Other Stories*--Davidson would cease to write prose fiction altogether.

1895 was for Davidson, as for other decadents, a watershed year. The Wilde trial and the ensuing backlash against decadence in effect freed Davidson from the decadent label and literary style with which he was never very at ease and enabled him to pursue his own interests. Davidson, however, could not afford to continue indefinitely on the high artistic course he had proposed for himself in February 1895. Recognizing this fact Davidson, always searching for the lesser among evils with respect to work engaged in to make money, proposed to substitute novel-writing with play-writing. For Davidson, play-writing represented a happy compromise between the claims of high art and the demands of the commercial marketplace particularly since Davidson "had always regarded the drama as his true province" (Townsend 287).[8] In the literary plans he had laid out to McCormick in April 1895, he had even expressed his intention of writing for the stage after "exhausting his lyric impulse" in two straight years of poetry writing (*Selected Poems* 187). An offer from Forbes-Robertson to adapt François Coppée's popular French play *Pour la Couronne* in 1895 hastened Davidson's return to play-writing, though he would have preferred to write original plays.

The years from 1895 to 1900, then, saw Davidson engaged in two primary literary pursuits. On the one hand, in order to satisfy his artistic ideals, he was engaged in what he called "exhausting his lyric impulse," the product of which was two volumes of poetry; on the other hand, he was engaged in play-writing, work that was meant to satisfy both his artistic ideals and his need to make money. In many respects, Davidson was well-positioned to succeed in the theatre because his own theatrical interests were so well-suited to the tastes of the time. At the time when Davidson decided to take up play-writing, romantic historical dramas written in blank verse were in vogue and were as, if not more, popular than the "modern" plays of Shaw, Wilde and Pinero. As Townsend suggests, these dramas appealed to "a middle class desire for a restoration of" a "poetic, ennobling, and moral . . . theater" and Davidson's tendency towards "rhetoric and unrestrained emotionalism" and his love of blank verse suited him admirably to the task of writing successful romantic historical dramas (291, 292). In Bourdieu's terms, Davidson's position at this time was one in which a homology existed between the expectations inscribed in his position as producer of romantic verse dramas and his disposition, a situation which explains Davidson's willingness to engage in what, to a writer of the sub-field of restricted production, might be regarded as a selling out, a compromising of artistic principles (*Field* 94).

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[8] Davidson had written plays early in his career: *Bruce: A Drama in Five Acts* (1886); *Smith: A Tragedy* (1888); and a volume of plays aptly titled *Plays* (1889). None were produced, but they were published. Davidson was not the only one of those who counted themselves among the literary élite who believed the theatre represented an opportunity to make money and gain popularity without sullying one's robes. Henry James, for example, encouraged by Wilde's success in the theatre, attempted to write for the stage. His play, *Guy Domville*, however, was a spectacular failure and simply served to further ingrain James's contempt for what he described as the "Philistine" and "barbarian" British public (qtd. in Freedman 167).

For the Crown was a solid, though not spectacular, success in both popular and critical terms. The success bode well for Davidson's future career as a playwright and he began to receive many offers. To Davidson's chagrin, however, the offers tended to be for adaptations, not for the original work he so earnestly wanted to produce. Davidson continued to adapt plays and began writing his own in 1898, receiving commissions from such prominent figures in the theatrical field as Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, George Alexander and George Bernard Shaw.[9] Despite the support of these members of the theatrical élite, Davidson's theatrical success was not to last. The apparent affinity between public taste and his own interests as a playwright were superficial at best and Davidson's failure lay in his inability to mediate successfully between his artistic ideals and the demands of the commercial theatrical marketplace. Thus, although he certainly made concessions to public taste in his theatrical enterprises, he also filled his plays with his unpopular beliefs and philosophies. By 1900 his enthusiasm for the theatre and his belief in his ability to produce plays that were at once popular and artistic was diminishing. Davidson now began to regard his ventures in the commercial theatre as hack work which would subsidize his new-found vehicle for artistic expression--his *Testaments*, dramatic monologues in blank verse.

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[9] *Self's the Man*, an original play, was commissioned by Tree, while an adaptation of *Phèdre* was commissioned by Mrs. Patrick Campbell. Davidson wrote an original play called *Lancelot* for Alexander and another original, *The Game of Life*, for Shaw. None were produced. Of all Davidson's theatrical efforts in this period only four adaptations were produced and none of his twelve original plays was produced.

Davidson published five *Testaments* between 1901 and 1909: *The Testament of a Vivisector*(1901), *The Testament of a Man Forbid* (1901), *The Testament of an Empire Builder* (1902), *The Testament of a Prime Minister* (1904), and *The Testament of John Davidson* (1908). The *Testaments* reveal the degree to which Davidson had rejected the decadent and aesthetic artistic credo which he had gone at least some way towards fulfilling in his work of the 1890s. While Davidson had never been a delicate stylist in the manner of Symons or Dowson in his poetry, he had certainly dabbled in the kind of impressionistic verse popular among decadents. In the *Testaments*, however, Davidson moved further towards developing what his biographer has described as an "intellectualized polyglot diction," an "anti-literary, synthetic language" (Townsend 422).

In this respect, Davidson's development of a new aesthetic in his *Testaments* anticipates modernist, and particularly Poundian ideas. Like the modernists who followed Davidson, Davidson did not want to write pretty lulling poetry in a decadent aesthetic manner. Like Pound, Davidson wanted to jar the reader into awareness by juxtaposing scientific, intellectual and pedantic language with colloquial language. In addition, Davidson was now fully guided by a decidedly undecadent belief that the great writer should be a teacher and messenger for his age (a belief that he had always held but which he had become increasingly zealous about after 1895). He therefore gave full reign in these works to his scientific materialist and imperialist totalitarian philosophies, ideas which had been present only in a limited fashion in his theatrical work. Where the decadents had insisted on style over matter, for Davidson matter was paramount, with some critics insisting that the matter and the dogmatic fashion in which it was delivered marred the poetry. This reaction was characteristic both of the contemporary criticism of the poetry and of later modernist assessments of it. Virginia Woolf, for example, complained of Davidson that he was "so burdened by all the facts which prove him right in his materialism that the poem breaks down beneath their weight; it becomes a lecture on biology and geology delivered by an irate and fanatical professor" (390). Again, the analogy with Pound is apt, Pound himself was regarded at times as one whose fascist political and anti-semitic views marred his own poetic efforts.[10]

If Davidson's emphasis on matter and his disregard for "poetic" language in his *Testaments* was decidedly undecadent, his stance towards his public remained characteristically decadent. Though not directly invoking a "*hypocrite lecteur*" trope, Davidson employed various means to affront his audience. In a note to the *Testament of a Vivisector*, for example, Davidson expressed his belief that the work would likely "offend both the religious and the irreligious mind" and was suitable only for those "willing to place all ideas in the crucible, and who are not afraid to fathom what is subconscious in themselves and others" (5). Similarly, the third of his *Testaments, The Testament of an Empire Builder*, began with an autobiographical parable. In it, Davidson tells the story of "the protagonist," an artist who comes into the market-place "to sing songs that had not been sung before," his Testaments (7). He is rejected, however, by the public who want only to hear his "old songs" (8). Not getting what they want, the public stones him and only once he is dead do they wish that they had listened to his Testaments (13).

This parable reflects Davidson's increasing bitterness towards an unreceptive public but also his frustration at being so strongly associated with his "old songs" of the 1890s. Having embarked upon what he regarded as uncompromising artistic work, he was ashamed of his 1890s work which was clearly more commercialistic in nature and consequently not an accurate representation of his artistic ideology. Davidson was so averse to these works that he was desperately trying to buy back the rights for them in 1906 and was threatening legal action if any of them were published. In addition, he repeatedly rejected publisher Grant Richards's suggestions that he should re-publish these works, a stance that mystified Filson Young, Richards's reader, who remarked: "it is a great pity that [Davidson] should dislike the only books of his that have a chance of selling" (Young to Richards, 15 October 1906).[11]

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[10] That Pound should have achieved canonical status as a poet while Davidson suffers neglect even as they endorsed similar artistic principles is one of those accidents of literary history that Franco Moretti has recently attempted to theorize in his article "The Slaughterhouse of Literature." Making a comparison of detective stories, Moretti develops a theory to explain why it is that Doyle has achieved canonical status while so many, many other writers of detective fiction are lost to "the slaughterhouse of literature." Moretti attributes Doyle's success to the "chance" unintentional stumbling across of a formal element--the clue in the case of detective fiction--that comes to be a definitive element of the genre, indeed that comes to seem organic to the genre (215-16). Though beyond the scope of my study, this methodology could certainly be profitably applied to formulate a theory about why those, like Davidson, who were formulating modernist poetic principles before modernism failed to make their mark. According to Moretti's methodology, Pound and other modernists would have locked on, unintentionally, to some formal aspect not picked up on by Davidson.

Though Davidson felt contempt for the public, abjured his early works, and displayed no willingness to compromise to the public taste, he nonetheless yearned for popular success. Davidson felt that an audience for his work could be created and urged Richards to "publish" rather than merely "issue" his work by which he meant the work be given a great deal of publicity (Townsend 364). And despite Davidson's contempt for a commercialistic society, he demonstrated himself willing to involve his artistic work in its processes. Urging Richards to embark on a large-scale promotion of his play the *Theatrocrat* in 1905, Davidson described his work as a commodity, albeit a luxury one: "Books are a luxury, and therefore they compete with everything for which money is paid, with cigars and soap, whisky and Cook's tours, fur coats and kisses" (qtd. in Townsend 365).

Davidson's attitude was once again baffling to Richards and Young. Where the publisher and his reader advocated re-issuing Davidson's older work to enhance his popularity among a broader readership, they could not comprehend Davidson's desire for greater publicity for his contemporary work. For them, Davidson, in his current guise, was a coterie writer, appealing to a niche of the intelligentsia, and needed no vulgar publicity stunts to promote his work. Advising Richards against advertising Davidson, Young wrote:

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[11] In 1904 Davidson, out of financial desperation, finally gave in to Lane's urging that he issue a volume of his earlier work and oversaw the organization of a volume of "selected" poems. He insisted, however, that the edition include the entire text of his recent *Testament of a Man Forbid* which represented his current artistic style and philosophy.

> I hope you will not be tempted into advertising Davidson's book, as in the first place Davidson's books are not the kind that can be advertised into success, nor do they need advertising. A bare announcement of them is enough to show those who are interested that they can be purchased. And if I were Davidson I would not want them advertised. I think it is much more dignified not to. (5 September 1906)

Young's remarks indicate the degree to which ideas about positioning within the literary field were firmly entrenched and were coloured by a certain élitism. Though certainly an argument against advertising Davidson might be made by appealing to the abysmally poor sales of his previous works, Young couches the argument in terms of Davidson's positioning as a coterie writer appealing to a highbrow audience unlikely to be swayed by vulgar advertisement. Davidson's status as a coterie writer of a certain kind circumscribed his ability to manoeuvre within the literary field. Publicity-mongering was effective for best-selling and popular writers but was not "dignified" for those positioned as Davidson was.

By seeking the kind of advertising normally accorded to popular writers, Davidson had found another way of trying to bridge the gap between highbrow and lowbrow culture. Whereas in the 1890s Davidson had bridged this gap by making concessions to popular taste in his work, Davidson, who now refused to make such concessions, believed that advertisement might work where appealing to public taste had failed. Davidson believed that his best work, his "art," would be appreciated by the public if only it was put within their reach through large-scale advertising. Davidson's position on advertising, though unusual for one who counted himself an artist among the literary élite, indicates the degree to which positionings within the field are complicated by the contingencies of literary production and reception.

In a period that has been acknowledged in literary history as unremarkable for its poetry, Davidson tried to establish what he called a "new poetry . . . a new cosmogony, a new habitation for the imagination of men" (qtd. in O'Connor 91). The result was failure in both critical and popular terms. While Davidson has come to be regarded by some scholars as "the first of the moderns," within the period itself and despite the fact that his philosophy of poetry echoes much that Pound would espouse, Davidson, like Dowson, fell victim to the modernists' need to disavow their literary predecessors (Sloan ix). He was completely overlooked, for example, in Yeats's *Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935* (1936) and he hardly fared much better among high modernists. It is true that Eliot would come to acknowledge, on a number of occasions, a debt to Davidson. These acknowledgements, however, occurred in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s when Eliot himself was a well established respectable man of letters in a position to acknowledge his literary fathers. His attitude to Davidson within the period itself, at a point when the modernists were anxious to set themselves in opposition to the old guard, was more dismissive. Writing in the *Egoist* in October 1917, Eliot declared "The truth is that Davidson was a violent Scotch preacher with an occasional flash of exact vision" (qtd. in Ricks 394). Davidson's attempts to "make poetry new" in the first nine years of the new century were disregarded by the modernists who disliked the dogmatic nature of this later work and would "make it new" in a different manner. Woolf described Davidson's manner in these later poems "as of one dinning the Gospel into the heads of an indifferent public" (390). Similarly Eliot, once he finally did acknowledge Davidson's influence on him, expressed a marked preference for the Davidson of the 1890s. Eliot found Davidson's blank verse "rather hard going" and the philosophy "uncongenial" (Eliot xii). It was as a poet of the 1890s, then, and not as the Poundian proto-modernist of Davidson's *Testaments* phase that the modernists ultimately acknowledged an appreciation for Davidson. Woolf expressed her appreciation of Davidson's nineties work in her review article and for this work she declared him a "spokesman for his time," that time being of course the 1890s (390). Despite his attempts to forge a new poetry, then, a modern poetry that he wished would wipe all memory of his hated 1890s work from the minds of the public, Davidson was unable to break away from the decadent label which had been bestowed upon him in the 1890s. He was a decadent in spite of himself. His suicide in 1909, following close upon the heels of Symons's breakdown in 1908 helped to confirm the stereotype image of the 1890s decadents. Davidson's fate would become part of the decadent fictions that would circulate in the memoirs and histories of the *fin de siècle* so popular from the pre-war through to the post-war period.

III

Arthur Machen (1863-1947): The Difficult Decadent

That Machen began writing *The Hill of Dreams* in the fall of 1895--a novel that, with its echoes of Wilde, Huysmans, and Pater, may be considered one of the most decadent novels of the period--suggests a decidedly rebellious attitude on the author's part akin to the kind of "warfare" on the Philistines that Yeats described in speaking of the alliance between Smithers and the ostracized writers of the 1890s.[12] But this action came not without a great deal of thought and certainly not without costs for Machen. It is worthwhile to go into some detail here in order to tease out some of the complications of the positions of those associated with decadence and also to demystify some of the unquestioned stereotypes of the disinterested artist. Though Machen adopted a decidedly jocular tone in a letter to John Lane written just days after Wilde's imprisonment in which he suggested postponing the publication of *The Three Imposters* because of an "attack of virtue" on the part of the general public, his tone belied some very real concerns regarding his literary future. Indeed, as he indicated to Lane less than a month later, Machen had been giving a great deal of thought to his "literary reputation" and "the best course to take in the future" (Machen, letter to Lane, 29 June 1895). Machen's concerns about the consequences of the Wilde trial on his own career were amplified because of his involvement in a court case concerning *The Memoirs of Casanova* (a book which would have been considered by many to be pornographic), a work which he had translated and invested financially in. The hearing was set for June 15, 1895, just a few weeks after Wilde's imprisonment. In light of this evidence, we can see that his joking to Lane about Quilter's article and the "attack of virtue" which made the climate for the reception of the *Three Imposters* "unhealthy" concealed anxieties about how the outcome of the hearing might affect his literary reputation (Machen, letter to Lane, 5 June 1895).

The case had nothing to do with the perniciousness of the book in question. Rather, the publishers (Machen's former employers Robson and Kerslake) were suing the printers (Nichols and Co.) for making extra copies of the book which they were selling, thus spoiling the market for Robson and Kerslake.[13] Nonetheless, Machen and the publishers of the book were concerned that the book's questionable status might be raised in the hearing and that the law would not protect such a book. Machen was taking steps to garner support from prominent booksellers and men of letters like Richard Garnett and George Saintsbury in order that they might speak on behalf of what he termed the "great literary and historic interest" of the book (Machen, letter to Garnett, 7 June 1895).[14] In light of the recent Wilde trial, Machen obviously feared discovery of his involvement with a book which would have been considered by many to be pornographic and he must have been worrying about his future as a writer. He implored Lane not to "mention my partnership in the Casanova affair. Nobody knows that I have any pecuniary interest in the matter + of course I don't desire anybody to know of it" (letter to Lane, 17 June 1895).

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[12] It is likely that if the book had been published in the 1890s rather than in 1907 it would have accorded Machen a prominent place in the ensuing cultural and literary histories of decadence from which he has been largely neglected.

The case must have been settled with no apparent consequences for Machen's reputation for by June 29th his attitude towards his literary reputation had altered considerably and he was clearly no longer in "doubt as to the best course to take for the future" (Machen, letter to Lane, 29 June 1895).[15] Though Machen had shown himself willing to adopt a more commercial Stevensonian style in his attempts earlier in the decade to extend his audience beyond the select few connoisseurs who constituted the audience of his medieval, Rabelaisian, and "erotic" works, he now declared himself unwilling to make any further concessions to public opinion. He refused to pander to the moral scruples of the British public by consenting to Lane's requests that he tone down *The Three Imposters*: "I am not going to be 'quiltered' in any manner whatsoever," he wrote to Lane, and declared himself indifferent to Lane's threat to shelve the project (Letter to Lane, 29 June 1895). Apparently the events of the first half of 1895, those that both directly and indirectly involved him, steeled Machen in his resolve to remain true to his artistic principles at all costs and this decision altered his position within the literary field. If Machen had previously mediated between the claims of high art and the claims of the marketplace, he now seemed to be exiling himself to the extreme reaches of the autonomous sector of the field of cultural production where, as Bourdieu notes, "the only audience aimed at is other producers" (*Field* 15). But Machen's action was actually more extreme for, in embarking on the production of a virtually unpublishable novel--*The Hill of Dreams*, the portrayal of the decadent sensibility of a morbid artist--as he did in the fall of 1895, Machen was effectively removing himself altogether from the literary field. That Machen was fairly conscious of his withdrawal is revealed in the attitude he took towards his manuscript. Presenting it to Grant Richards in May 1897, Machen warned him that he would probably find it "impossible" and expressed his doubts that the novel would find a publisher at least "not for some time" (*Selected Letters* 229). And indeed the novel was rejected in 1897 by many publishers including Richards, Lane, Methuen, and the Unicorn Press. Even as late as 1902, Richards was still worried that the publication of such a book might well "land the publisher in the dock" (Richards to Machen, 6 May 1902).

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[13] My account of this incident is culled from letters Machen wrote to Lane (7 June 1895, 17 June 1895) and to Richard Garnett (7 June 1895) and also from John Gawsworth's unpublished biography of Machen which suggests that Leonard Smithers was also involved. For Smithers's role in the Casanova publication see Nelson, *Publisher* 36, 403n3.

[14] Machen wrote to Richard Garnett personally but asked Lane to intervene on his behalf with George Saintsbury. In his letter to Lane, Machen mentioned that Bernard Quaritch was "coming forward from the bookseller's point of view, to say that the book is reputable, + one that he would sell without scruple" (7 June 1895).

[15] Gawsworth states that the case resulted in a compromise with Robson and Kerslake letting Smithers take over the book (155).

In his attempt to develop what he described as "another manner, which would be more worthy of being called a style, an expression of individuality" (Machen, notes on *Hill of Dreams* 39), Machen mirrored the example of his protagonist, Lucian, by writing in so individual or solipsistic a style that the resulting work was, by the standards of the time, unable to perform its communicative function with the outside world. Even when the novel was published in 1907 by the hitherto timid Richards who finally agreed to publish it without demanding alterations, it was greeted with abuse by critics whose rhetoric recalled the anti-decadent discourse of the 1890s.[16] A review in the *Outlook* referred to it as "art . . . fallen on unclean and fatal days" (317), while others described its unhealthiness (*Birmingham Gazette and Express* 4; *Birmingham Post* qtd. in Machen, *Precious Balms* 93) and its "morbidity" (*Birmingham Gazette and Express* 4; *Morning Post* 2; *Daily Chronicle* 3). The *Athenaeum* wondered at the "infinite pains" Machen took "on astonishing the bourgeois, who in all likelihood will never have the privilege of reading his books" (317), while an American periodical, *The Nation*, described it as a "morbid phase of English fiction in which sound, color, and scent are put to superfine use by neurotic young gentlemen who should be shut up or set at manual labor" (37). If this discourse characterized the novel's reception in 1907, a full twelve years after the Wilde trials, it is not surprising that Machen could not find a publisher in 1897 when he completed the manuscript.

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[16] The story was initially published in magazine form in 1904 in *The Horlicks Magazine and Home Journal for Australia, India and the Colonies*. Its appearance in this unlikely publication (a publication put out by the Horlicks malted milk company) was due to the intervention of Machen's friend and fellow dabbler in things occult, A. E. Waite, who served as a director on the board of Horlicks. Waite convinced the board to finance a

In developing his new manner, Machen focused on cultivating and perfecting his style and seemed, therefore, to be firmly committed to decadent principles, particularly in the post-Wilde trial context when stylistic preciosity was regarded with deep suspicion. But actually, what Machen was working towards, as described in his critical work, *Hieroglyphics* (1902), was a mystical re-figuring of decadence that was, in many respects, similar to the direction being taken by Arthur Symons and Yeats as they developed a symbolist aesthetic, an aesthetic that was elaborated in Symons's *Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899).[17] In his book, Symons characterized symbolist literature as "a literature in which the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream," and as a literature that expresses "an unseen reality apprehended by the consciousness," declaring it "a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual" (3, 1, 5). Machen, for his part, described what he called "fine

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magazine, a magazine which he used as a vehicle for his interests in the occult (Reynolds and Charlton 53).

[17] Machen would likely have taken exception to the comparison with Symons for though their aesthetic theories coincide in their mystical, romantic, anti-realist, and anti-materialist emphases, Machen and Symons find their ideals in completely different sources. Whereas Symons finds his examples in French Literature exclusively, Machen finds his examples in the English and Classical tradition. Indeed, in what may well be a response to Symons (Machen began composing *Hieroglyphics* the year that Symons's work was published) Machen insists in an appendix that French literature is, for the most part, not "fine" literature.

literature" similarly but whereas for Symons the key word is "symbolism," for Machen it is "ecstasy." Machen's fine literature which is characterized by "ecstasy" is like Symons's symbolism in that it too seeks to impart a "sense" of and a "desire" for the "unknown" (11). So too, Machen's fine literature is characterized by a "withdrawal from common life and the common consciousness" and appeals to our desire for "the supernatural," our desire "to hear . . . echoes of the eternal song (11, 51). In stylistic terms, the theories of Symons and Machen overlapped as well. Both advocated a Paterian theory likening language to music. Machen's stylistic theory, for example, advocated the "use and choice of words and phrases and cadences that the ear and the soul through the ear receive an impression of subtle but most beautiful music" (39).

While such an aesthetic helped Yeats to fashion a post-1890s identity for himself and also helped emerging Modernist poets like Eliot who were inspired by Symons's book, for Machen this aesthetic seemed, at least from the point of view of contemporary critics, to entrench him more firmly in the decadent 1890s. One review of the *Hieroglyphics*, for example, described Machen's theory in familiar counter-decadent terms as "false, unwholesome, and effeminate" (*Glasgow Herald*, qtd. in Machen, *Precious Balms* 29). This discrepancy may, in part, be explained by the genres to which these similar theoretical principles were being applied. Though Symons discusses the work of a number of French fiction writers in *The Symbolist Movement*, the symbolist aesthetic had its primary influence on English poets. Perhaps because of the more limited audience for poetry, poetry largely escaped the censure that fiction received from moralists from the 1880s on. For poetry to be "poetic" was no sin but, for well into the first quarter of the twentieth century, poetic prose was often suspect and in the Edwardian period Machen was repeatedly castigated in reviews for such stylistic sins as "watery Paterian mysticism" and an "unrelieved preciosity of style" (*Precious Balms* 69, 60).

Written under the influence of aesthetic ideals that would become singularly unpopular in the wake of the Wilde trial as many inveighed against the decadent cult of style, virtually all that Machen produced in the period 1895-1899 was unpublishable at the time it was written.[18] Though Machen did, from 1897-1899, take up a position as assistant editor for a literary periodical called *Literature* (a forerunner to the *Times Literary Supplement*), he had clearly decided that as far as his "art" was concerned he would remove himself as much as possible from the literary field. This choice was enabled initially by an inheritance that gave him an additional income of about £500 a year for about fifteen years, meaning that he was not dependent on writing for his living. But after this inheritance ran out, Machen removed himself even more literally from the field by becoming an actor in the Benson Company. When Machen did make an attempt, with the eager support of Grant Richards, to return to the literary field from about 1905-1907, he was not keen to try to popularize his writing as he had done previously. Rather than mediate between the claims of high art and the demands of the literary marketplace as he had done in such productions as *The Great God Pan* and *The Three Imposters*, Machen tried a different way of negotiating the two poles of the literary field. He involved himself in the production of what he regarded as diametrically opposed forms of writing, making his money as a journalistic hack for Lord Alfred Douglas's *Academy* (1907-1908), *T. P.'s Weekly* (1908-10), and the *Evening News* (1910-21), while trying to pursue his purely literary interests independently.

Machen's apparent indifference to the publication of his literary work, his anti-professionalism, made him something of a conundrum for those who played by the rules of the literary field. Grant Richards, whose publishing enterprise centred largely on the production of "coterie" novels, saw in Machen a potentially profitable writer of such fare. Machen's tales of the 1890s contained elements of the fantasy, horror, and detective genres that had only increased in popularity in the Edwardian period as the niche markets for this fiction expanded. Responding to the interest in such fiction, Richards approached Machen about re-issuing his 1890s material. The result was *The House of Souls* (1906) which contained the stories from *The Great God Pan and the Inmost Light* and *The Three Imposters*, as well as material that Machen had written in the 1890s but that had not, as yet, been published. While Machen was willing to publish already-written work in popular genres, he took umbrage at Richards's suggestion that he should continue to write this kind of fiction. Richards believed that "a fantastic romance in the genre of *The Three Imposters*," would be "a commercial success," but Machen, insofar as his artistic literary career was concerned, was committed to producing work that was of interest to him, saving his money-making work for his journalism (Letter from Richards to Machen, 27 August 1906; Letter from Richards to Machen, 28 August 1906).

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[18] Much of it would not be published until years later. *Ornaments in Jade*, written in 1897, was published in 1924; "The White People" and "A Fragment of Life," written in 1899, were published in 1906; "The Red Hand," written in 1895, was published in 1906.

Machen's obstinacy regarding his writing was perplexing to Richards who described Machen as "a preposterous person . . . impossible to do business with" and as "an uncommercial soul, though extraordinarily difficult to handle" (Richards to Alfred Knopf, 25 February 1921; Richards to Filson Young, 30 August 1906). Richards's use of the qualifying "though" in his comments to Young indicates his assumption, an assumption he presumes Young shares with him, that "uncommercial souls" are generally easy to handle, presumably because such souls are grateful to find publishers willing to take them on. Machen in being both "uncommercial" and "difficult to handle" went against the grain of Richards's experience. Machen was difficult precisely because, though uncommercial, he demanded what Richards declared "prohibitive terms" for his work as though he were the most popular and commercial of writers (Richards to Young, 30 August 1906). In addition, he wanted no costs spared in the presentation of his work. Indeed, he felt it would sell better presented as an obviously "high art" production. Complaining of Richards's handling of Machen's work, Machen wrote Martin Secker in 1910, "I have always been of the opinion that my books have not been properly handled. They should not be put on the market as ordinary 6/- novels, but rather in the style adopted--I think--for *Marius the Epicurean*: blue boards, white backs and a price like 10/6 net" (*Selected Letters* 230).

This contradictory behaviour on the part of Machen, his inability to play by the rules of the field, was a direct result of the decisions he made in the summer of 1895 which led him to abandon any idea of mediating between the claims of high art and the demands of the literary marketplace. Instead, Machen occupied the opposing poles independently distinguishing between his journalistic hack work at the commercial end of the field and his literary work at the high artistic end. His interestedness at one pole of the field enabled his disinterestedness at the other or, as Richards remarked in a letter to fellow publisher Alfred Knopf: "[h]e makes a living by writing for the *Evening News* and does not seem to care what happens to his books" (25 February 1921). It was precisely by writing for the *Evening News*, a job which he referred to as "prostitution of the soul," that Machen afforded himself the freedom to not care what happened to his books (qtd. in Sweetser, *Arthur Machen* 36).

Machen, however, was unable to maintain this position with any consistency. Machen's hack work afforded him little time for his creative endeavours and the re-publication of his 1890s works in *The House of Souls* and the publication, finally, of *The Hill of Dreams* in 1907, were his only works of significance published in the Edwardian period. These had failed on many levels: they did not establish Machen, as Richards hoped they might, as a popular coterie writer in the vein of H. de Vere Stacpoole, Robert Hichens, or Edgar Jepson; they did not garner Machen the critical acclaim that would establish him among an Edwardian literary élite that included Conrad (a writer Machen despised), Ford, Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy, some of whom, like Machen, were products of the 1890s; and finally, they failed to give him the financial freedom he had hoped might subsidize his full return to the literary life. Still, Machen struggled on, producing *The Secret Glory*, a work he was invested in as "art," but which would not be published until 1922. Mainly, however, the years from 1908-1914 saw Machen fully occupied in his work as a journalist, without the time to pursue the literature that he felt to be his true calling.

Machen's re-emergence as a figure in the literary field coincided, ironically enough, with the emergence of what we now call high modernism in 1914. Machen would not be part of this literary avant-garde--in part because his interests in a mystical and symbolistic aesthetic were akin to the symbolist philosophy of Yeats and Symons which was regarded by the high-Modernist Pound as antithetical to the imagist aesthetic he was promoting (though Eliot would later develop an interest in a mystical and symbolic aesthetic)--but also because Machen's literary success would be of the "lowest" kind in "high" artistic terms. In the year that Eliot and Pound would meet, a year that also saw the establishment of *Blast* and the *Egoist*, the publication of Joyce's *Dubliners* (ironically Richards would ask Machen to review this book), and the serialization of his *Portrait of the Artist*, Machen wrote "The Bowmen," a work that would be read by many more people than would read the works of the "men of 1914," that year or indeed for many years to come. "The Bowmen," a story about the miraculous apparition of St. George and an army of English bowmen who come to the rescue of English soldiers in battle, was a piece of hack work produced by Machen for the *Evening News*. It appeared in the paper on September 29th and became a wildly popular success. More than that, it inspired the Legend of Mons, with people refusing to believe that Machen had made up the story. When it was published in book form with a few other stories in 1915, it sold 50,000 copies in the first three months, 100,000 in a year.

Ironically, this piece of hack work would bring Machen the most fame he would ever receive, but, despite the large sales, it would do so without the accompanying compensatory fortune that might have freed Machen from hack work. The newspaper, not Machen, would receive remuneration for the story. The success of this story would largely determine the course of Machen's subsequent manoeuvrings within the literary field and put an end to Machen's attempts to maintain a sharp distinction between his literary art and his hack work. While the *Evening News* allowed Machen to publish four long works to be serialized in the paper, the publication venue limited the degree to which Machen could indulge his artistic ideals.

But Machen would not be wholly relegated to the ranks of the hack writer of newspaper serials for long. If 1914 stood as a defining moment for Machen in terms of marking him as a producer of "low" periodical fiction, a status which placed him in diametric opposition to the "high" modernist writers who were establishing themselves in the same year, 1922, the "high" Modernist *annus mirabilis*, marked another similarly significant image-altering moment for Machen. In the year that saw the publication of Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot's *Wasteland*, and Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, Machen's decidedly non-modernist work, the *Secret Glory*, which he had written in 1907, was published. More importantly, Machen's major works were being re-issued in a uniform series by Alfred Knopf in America and by Martin Secker in England. Machen had a significantly influential fan-base in America including the Chicago newspaper man, bookman, and collector Vincent Starrett, Paul Jordan-Smith a California don and book collector, Robert Hillyer, professor of English at Harvard, novelists James Branch Cabell, Ben Hecht, Carl Van Vechten, and the horror writer H. P. Lovecraft.

In "Arthur Machen and Genre: Filial and Fannish Alternatives," Donald M. Hassler has described Machen's popularity at this time as part of broader anti-modernist trend in the post-war period. Hassler's argument accords with my claim that, even prior to and during the war, there was a strong anti-modernist trend. Machen, however, took somewhat longer than other 1890s figures to profit from it. Hassler's elaboration of the traditionalist and anti-modernist *fin de siècle* nostalgia of the post-war period that I have discussed earlier focuses on the figure of the book collector. Hassler characterizes the book collecting culture of this period as anti-modernist, arguing that it countered a cold, hard, professional and intellectual modernism with a soft sentimental romanticism and nostalgia, rejecting professionalism in favour of a studied amateurism (118-122). Where high modernists rejected their intellectual fathers, the proponents of this anti-modernist trend were characterized by what Hassler describes as their "determination to 'face the father'," indeed, to embrace the father (119). Machen garnered a great deal of attention among book collectors of the 1920s, especially for his works with a decidedly 1890s flavour. Machen's works were fetching handsome prices throughout the period, an ironic kind of popularity that, like his newspaper success, brought Machen no money for himself though it contributed to his symbolic status among a certain coterie.

Playing off this sense of nostalgia, Knopf, in America, issued his uniform series of Machen in volumes of a non-standard size with yellow binding, reminiscent of the decadent *Yellow Book* of the 1890s. And certainly, it was as much the decadent 1890s flavour of his works as their mystical and supernatural elements that attracted many of his new audience of admirers. Starrett, for example, titled his study of Machen "the novelist of ecstacy and sin," while another admirer dubbed him "the flower-tunicked priest of nightmare" (qtd. in Dobson 6). Though glad of the admirers, Machen was uneasy with the decadent associations and continually disavowed his involvement with the movement of the 1890s. In his introduction to a 1916 edition of *The Great God Pan*, Machen declared that he held "not even a small part, but no part at all" of the decadent 1890s movement and insisted on his distance from "literary societies and sodalities" (vii, viii). He maintained this stance even as his works were re-published through the 1920s (even though many of these had been written in the 1890s), writing in 1925 to Munson Havens, a Machen admirer, that the "products" of the 90s had "very little" value. "I would rather read about Mr. Micawber, one chapter of Mr. Micawber," he continued, "than all the literature produced between 1890 and 1895" (*A Few Letters* 33). To a certain extent, Machen's claims were true. His name only very rarely appeared in the 1890s memoirs that became so popular from the late Edwardian period on and he received only a brief passing mention in Holbrook Jackson's landmark book, *The Eighteen Nineties*.

Machen's continual disavowal of his involvement in "movements," "literary cliques" and "literary associations" belied his quite active engagement in other kinds of groups. In his biography of Machen, Mark Valentine has described Machen's involvement in fraternities and drinking societies like the Rabelasian Order of Tosspots (ROT), the Sodality of the Shadows (SS) and, somewhat more seriously, The New Bohemians, not to mention his membership in the Twilight Order of the Golden Dawn at the end of the nineteenth century. Machen's general disdain for literary cliques and groups were part and parcel of his situating himself in opposition to the kind of modernist intellectualism which characterized the modernist literary élite. Machen's interest in irreverent societies and clubs like the New Bohemians which were not exclusively composed of literary men was part of a resistance to the modernist, hard, cold intellectualism that Hassler describes in his article on Machen's place in a "filial and fannish" anti-modernism: filial with respect to the numerous young men like Munson Havens, Montgomery Evans, and John Gawsworth who gathered around Machen and looked upon him as a father figure; fannish in the sense of Machen's developing cachet, particularly in America, among readers and devotees of horror and mystery pulp genres.

Machen, then, found the coterie audience that Richards had believed he might attract though Machen had to come to terms with the fact that his popularity largely rested on his 1890s material. Though aligned with writers of "low" pulp genres and not with the contemporary modernist literary élite, Machen nonetheless achieved a high status within this sector of the literary field. His tales of mystery, horror and suspense transcended these genres, according to his admirers, by virtue of their stylistic excellence and because they were ultimately more mystical than horrific. In these respects Machen was, according to Carl Van Vechten, not obviously a writer for "the man in the street" or "the idle bystander"--though these kinds of readers "will not find his book[s] lacking in charm"--but rather for the literary connoisseur (162, 164). The paradox of Machen's early career remained with him through the end as his works continued to challenge the distinctions between high and low art. Was Machen a "high" writer of "low" art or a "low" writer of "high" art? Ultimately Machen's liminal status deprived him both of the rewards due to high artists (ie. literary posterity and symbolic capital) and those due to popular low artists (money) both as a decadent and in his post-decadent afterlife.

IV

M. P. Shiel (1865-1947): The Mediating Decadent

As in the case of Dowson, Davidson, and Machen, the Wilde scandal and the ensuing backlash against decadence of 1895 coincided with a change in literary direction for M. P. Shiel whose *Prince Zaleski* of earlier that year earned him the charge of being "morbid" and "degenerate" (*Academy* 312; *Guardian* 917). Initially, in terms of his literary output, Shiel would seem determinedly to resist tempering his art to the newly reticent literary values. The result of this resistance was *Shapes in the Fire* published by Lane in November 1896. *Shapes in the Fire* was more decadent than *Prince Zaleski*, a work in which the decadent elements were filtered through a familiar and popular literary genre. The stories in *Shapes in the Fire*, on the other hand, with their exotic and otherworldly settings, stylistic preciosity, eccentric syntax, treatment of death, decay, and rotting processes took literary decadence to the extreme. As one contemporary reviewer put it, "Some of the matter suggests the exclamations of a moon-struck, opium-eating book-worm who was being whirled round the world on a cyclone" (*Weekly Sun* 2). In addition, the volume departed widely from genres familiar to English readers, "def[ying] classification" according to the reviewer for the *Scotsman* (8).

It was this departure from the familiar that perhaps made *Shapes in the Fire* publishable where Machen's *Hill of Dreams* was not. Though Shiel's stories were unmistakably decadent--reviewers launched the familiar charges of morbidity, perversity, decadence, gruesomeness, and affectation against the collection--the volume was perhaps saved from an out-and-out attack by what reviewers referred to as their "obscurity" and "eccentricity." In other words, this was not a book likely to attract female and working-class readers who were the subject of much controversy with respect to the corrupting effects of certain kinds of literature from the 1880s onwards. As the *Weekly Sun* jokingly declared regarding the audience of Shiel's book: "The volume will prove a curious intellectual exercise to certain circles, and will become suitable for general reading about the time when the British workman takes to the Upanishads or the differential calculus for pastime. Mr. Shiel is too clever by a thousand degrees for the sober, burden-bearing portions of the world" (2). Shiel's decadence then in *Shapes in the Fire* was not the deliberately provocative "in your face" decadence of the *hypocrite lecteur* type. Nor was it deliberately salacious or perverse in a manner that would attract great numbers of readers to it. On the contrary, as one critic remarked, it required "patience to wade through the involved obscurities and complexities" of the stories (*Critic* 270).

On the basis of this volume of stories, then, it seems fair to say that Shiel decided to choose "high" over "popular" art in the wake of the Wilde trial and sought to distance himself from rather than to accommodate the wider reading public. This position is seemingly confirmed by the literary essay, written, like Wilde's "Critic as Artist" and "Decay of Lying," in dialogue form, that serves as the "interlude" in *Shapes in the Fire*. In this dialogue, called "Premier and Maker," Shiel sets forth his views on art distinguishing between "fine" ("a self-consciously-wise product of the pure imagination") and "gross" art ("a self-consciously-wise product of the observation)" (139), disparages the novel as art form (165-66), and expounds the decadent views that the "audience of fine artists is small" and that great work may only be recognized by as few as "five . . . cultivated persons" (159, 134).

In his manoeuvrings within the literary field at this time Shiel also self-consciously constructed himself as a literary artist, attaching himself to John Lane's literary élite. In letters to the publisher, for example, Shiel, eager to impress Lane of his artistic seriousness, derides his "old stories of the 'tea-cup' realistic sort of which I have grown to feel a little bit ashamed," excuses his involvement in the production of "a vile melodramatic novelette" for W.T. Stead by insisting that he cannot "do even vile things altogether vilely," and engages in witty, sophisticated musings on the status of the Bodley Head productions vis-à-vis the great books of the world (Shiel to Lane, 9 August 1894; Shiel to Lane, 21 February 1895; Shiel to Lane, 16 January 1895). So intent, it seems, was Shiel to represent himself as a true artist, the disinterested dilettante devoted to his craft, that he apparently neglected to discuss terms with Lane regarding the publication of *Prince Zaleski* until after he had sent the proofs of the book. Though Shiel flattered Lane to his face, he was more disparaging behind the publisher's back. Like Davidson, Shiel thought Lane's coterie was a sham literary élite and his involvement with it was largely opportunistic. On the day of Oscar Wilde's sentencing, an event he acknowledged in a letter to his sister, Shiel spoke disparagingly of Lane's coterie: "These damned little scribblers think I am one of them, and I am not" (Shiel to Augusta ["Gussie"] Shiel 30 April 1895).[19]

Whether Shiel's break with Lane was due to his sense of his artistic superiority or whether it was due to his sense, in the wake of the Wilde trial, that the coterie no longer held the power in the literary field that might be of use to him as an up-and-coming writer is unclear. Whether Shiel himself effected the distancing is also unclear. Shiel's snobbish sense of superiority may have been concealing a disappointment at not being able to make his way in this circle, a West Indian with black blood for whom English ways were strange indeed.[20] Like Machen, though even more so, Shiel is neglected in the memoirs and literary histories of the period. Though he later would brag of having known Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, Pierre Louÿs, George Egerton, and Ella D'Arcy, many of these people he probably met only once.[21] He was a fringe figure on the literary scene though he apparently shared rooms with and befriended Dowson for some of 1898.

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[19] Shiel's allusion to Wilde's sentencing leads him on a typical Shielian flight of fancy. Of Wilde he says, "Poor chap! I am sorry for him. It is not his fault: he is not well made: he is a *moral idiot*: he was born so: his mother made him so. *God will straighten him out*. It is ordained that he shall yet be perfect--without spot, or blemish--perfect as a sphere of the heavens." Shiel then goes on to describe his foreknowledge of the Wilde affair through his friendship with one of Lane's "young men" who told Shiel about Wilde's activities. This young man, as it turned out, was inclined to "buggery" also and Shiel goes on to describe how this young man had tried to seduce him. "I like playing Adam," he tells his sister, "but I draw the line at Eve. My Gussie may go to sleep with the calm assurance that her brother will never get in the family way by any man" (Shiel to Augusta Shiel, 30 April 1895).

[20] Shiel himself may also have been discriminated against on the basis of his racial difference, a difference that Shiel himself apparently tried to conceal. As a result, Shiel was subject to the curiosity of his literary peers. He was, for example, the subject of a parlour game at Arthur Machen's literary gatherings in the 1890s. As Machen recalled to

What is clear, however, is that, after 1897, Shiel's position within the literary field altered substantially, more than any other of the decadents I have discussed so far. He may, as Colin Wilson suggests, have been "glad to escape from the 'decadent' image he had created for himself" (214). The high artistic *Shapes in the Fire* would not be representative of the future course that Shiel's career would take. In fact, Shiel would go to the opposite extreme, immersing himself fully in the production of popular fiction in the way of serialized future war novels and novels of the imperialist adventure variety.[22] Shiel the decadent became Shiel the imperialist. Shiel the decrier of the novel form became Shiel the writer of serial fiction and popular novels. Though it is true that high-profile writers like Wells and Bennett wrote serials, there were also many thousands of hack writers who received little recognition and no literary prestige for the mass-produced fiction they churned out for the periodicals and newspapers. The move, then,

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friend A. E. Waite, "I used to have a sort of parlour game of asking people to what race they supposed Shiel belonged, & and each one guessed a different nation. And Jew Gollancz told me he was quite sure S. was a Jew" (*Arthur Machen: Selected Letters* 50). Such scrutiny must surely have added to Shiel's sense of alienation from his literary peers.

[21] Shiel may have had an affair with D'Arcy in the 1880s. Gawsworth, Shiel's first literary executor, makes this claim. No doubt Shiel is referring to D'Arcy in that 30th of April letter to his sister in which, after discussing Wilde and his own encounter with a "young man" of the Wilde type, he discusses his liaison with a "new woman" and offers up their correspondence for his sister's viewing.

[22] His works in this genre include *The Yellow Danger* (1898), a story about the invasion of Europe by the "yellow hordes"; *The Lord of the Sea* (1901), a story in which an overman figure, Richard Hogarth, takes over the sea as part of his campaign to get Britain to give up its system of permanent landownership; *The Yellow Wave* (1905) is a love story set against the background of a war between Russia and Japan; *The Dragon* (1913), published in revised form as *The Yellow Peril* (1929) is a return to the themes of *The Yellow Danger*. These war novels were clearly an appropriate venue for the recurring overman theme in Shiel's work although overmen types recur in all Shiel's fiction from the war novels to the romance novels.

was a risky one for Shiel who aspired to literary posterity and, as I have suggested in my discussion of *Prince Zaleski*, fancied himself a substantial cut above popular writers like Arthur Conan Doyle. Shiel would make every effort not to become one of the thousands of mere hacks who fed the public demand for serial fiction.

Shiel's turn to popular fiction was occasioned by his friendship with Louis Tracy, a writer of popular serials and novels with whom he would go on to collaborate on numerous stories under the name "Gordon Holmes" in the Edwardian period. In 1897 Tracy asked Shiel to write some instalments of a serial he was working on for a Pearson's publication when he was sick. This work resulted in Shiel securing a number of contracts for writing serials for Pearson and later for Harmsworth, among the most successful of the founding fathers of mass-circulated magazines and newspapers. Shiel was productively engaged in writing serials for popular magazines and newspapers through much of the Edwardian period and, by his own account, was making £2000 to £3000 a year on serials alone ("About Myself" 420).[23] But despite the amount he claimed to be making on serials, Shiel was also interested in revising his work for publication in book form. Though serials were often issued in book form after the serial had run, this interest in revising serials for book publication was not common to all serial writers. At a time when serial writing often paid far better than novel writing, many writers of serials could produce another profitable serial in the time it would take to revise and publish in book form a not-so-profitable novel.

For Shiel, however, the novel as serial and the novel as book were two distinct genres even if the product offered was virtually the same. Where the serial was undeniably hack work, the novel form could approach art. Similarly, as Shiel pointed out to Grant Richards, the markets for each were distinctly different: "it is two classes of people who buy book and magazine" (Shiel to Richards, 25 March 1898). Like Machen then, Shiel had found an alternative way of mediating between the claims of high art and the claims of the marketplace. Where Machen earned his livelihood through the journalism he regarded as hack work and pursued his art separately, Shiel earned his livelihood through serial publication while pursuing his art in the transformation of his serials into novels. Shiel referred to this process as making "*real* books from serials" and declared it "trying" as opposed to the "easy labour" of serial writing ("About Myself" 420; emphasis added). Shiel, then, had a great awareness of his audience, or rather audiences, and crafted his work with respect to its intended audience and in the book versions of his serials Shiel gives full play to his characteristically eccentric and florid writing style.

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[23] Shiel's claim to earning this much money is probably exaggerated. There is no evidence to suggest he made this much from his serials and far more to suggest that he made very little. His letters to Grant Richards are filled with pleas for money and Richards declared in his letter in support of Shiel's application to the Royal Literary Fund that he believed Shiel had "always been poor: often very poor" (Richards, letter to

Where most novelized versions of serials were published by publishers of cheap fiction for the masses, publishers like Hutchinson, Ward, Lock, and Co., and Laurie, Shiel's view of his revised serial as art made him more inclined to pursue a higher calibre of publisher. And, though Shiel would eventually publish with all the above-mentioned publishers, his first choice was Grant Richards. Though Lane had published Shiel's early "arty" work, Shiel's imperialist adventure novels, even if aesthetically enhanced with Shiel's florid writing style, were hardly of the Bodley Head type. Grant Richards, on the other hand, was an admirer of Shiel's Bodley Head productions (*Prince Zaleski* and *Shapes in the Fire*) but was also interested in establishing a firm along more commercial lines than that of the Bodley Head. Shiel, then, in his new guise, was a perfect writer for Richards's stable. He was an artistic writer but he was also a commercial writer. Shiel approached Richards in the same deliberately unprofessional dilettantish manner he had used with Lane. Writing as a gentleman to another gentleman Shiel explained his interest in Richards as a publisher:

> by some whim of my mind I have a fancy for you as a publisher; so if we be mutually just and generous in the money way, it is possible that we might strike up a permanent and commonly profitable relation. In making me an offer you should not make me a 'business' offer . . . but as much as you really think you can give; and that I shall probably accept. (Shiel to Richards, 9 March 1898)

Though Shiel's reasons for approaching Richards are obscured in mystification ("by

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Llewelyn Roberts, 20 September 1914). If ever he did make this kind of money from serials it was probably only for a short time early in the century.

some whim of my mind") he is, I would argue, less interested in money than in the prestige or cultural capital that an association with Richards, a man of culture and taste, would bring him. After all, Shiel was making substantial money from his works in their serialized form and he could well have gone to publishers more commonly associated with publishing this kind of popular fiction--publishers like Hutchinson, Ward, Lock and Co., Pearson, or Laurie--publishers that Shiel would, in fact turn to, at various points in his career after disagreements with Richards.

What Shiel sought from Richards was artistic legitimacy for the "real books" he had made from his hack serials. In addition, Shiel wanted the kind of intellectual and educated audience that would take him out of the obscure realms of the hack writer into the pantheon not of the literary greats but of the literary immortals. In later years, for example, Shiel would make much of critic Jules Claretie's comparison of Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* with Homer's *Odyssey*. Similarly, in his discussion of great writers in his essay "On Reading" he would class himself among and often ahead of the likes of Milton, Goethe, Virgil, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Horace, Bunyan, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Job.

By his own account and by virtue of the poor sales of the works he published with Richards (apart from their first collaboration, *The Yellow Danger*, which went into four editions over a period of about four years), Shiel was unable to attract the educated middlebrow and highbrow audience that represented Richards's primary market in the Edwardian period, though he counted some prominent Edwardian and Georgian literary figures among his admirers including G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Lascelles Abercrombie, Warwick Deeping, J. B. Priestly, Frank Swinnerton, Edward Shanks, J. C. Squire, Hugh Walpole, and H. G. Wells[24] His books, he wrote Richards in 1911 after having had some experience with publishers of cheap popular fiction, "sell better in cheap form [1 or 2 shilling editions or sixpenny editions] than in 6/- form" (Shiel to Richards, 4 July 1911). Though it is difficult to verify the veracity of Shiel's claims to popularity in cheap form, he must have made money--for "the cheap people" at least if not for himself--because these publishers did continue to publish his books in cheap form.[25] He was no Marie Corelli but his books must have paid their way for these publishers who frequently issued Shiel works in their cheap popular reprint series'.

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[24] These writers (and others) supported Shiel's application for a Civil List Pension in 1934.

For Richards, however, Shiel did not pay and his ongoing commitment to Shiel can only be explained by his great admiration for the writer and his belief that one day, as he wrote Shiel, the public would "tumble . . . to the fact that they have not half realised what a story teller they have in you" (3 July 1911). Despite his lack of success with Richards and in spite of what he referred to as his "unexpected" success in "cheap form," Shiel persisted in his pursuit of Richards (Shiel to Richards, 4 July 1911). Clearly, for Shiel, Richards--as a publisher whose career was "marked by the issue of many worthy books, with less pure trash . . . than the others in general"--represented the literary respectability necessary to ensure Shiel's status as a writer of substance (Shiel to Richards, 8 November, 1926). This status was important to Shiel who regarded himself as above the ranks of the "cheap people" and the writers they published. Shiel's investment in Richards was an attempt to ensure he would not fall into literary obscurity.

Shiel's pursuit of Richards was just one of the ways he attempted to resist his "low" position within the literary field. Over the years, Shiel continually and increasingly balked at the constraints of his position within the field and of the genres in which he wrote. Though he was resolved to writing popular novels, a genre he had denigrated in "Premier and Maker," his "object" he said in "On Reading" was "to heave the novel just a league or so nearer the sunset from the low Daudet-Besant novel where I met it--the modern novel with its lack of intellectuality, of philosophic intent, its cackle and chaos of cacóphony [sic], its music-hall tone of hail-fellow-well-met with its mean readers--positively a wretcheder object to-day than the novels of the Fieldings, Smolletts, themselves people of no particular distinction of intellect" (76). This intention sometimes led him into difficulties that expose the tensions in Shiel's attempts to mediate between his artistic ideals and his financial needs by incorporating intellectuality and philosophic intent into the modern-day popular novel. His novel, *The Last Miracle*

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[25] In letters to Richards, Shiel claimed that his early post-decadent period novels (i.e. *Yellow Danger*, *Contraband of War*, and *Cold Steel* earned him about £380 each. His novels written between 1904 and 1913, by his own account did not do quite as well, though they made him money, the lowest amount £20, the highest £250 (Shiel to Richards, 11 February 1900; Shiel to Richards, 24th October 1913).

(1906), for example--a novel chronicling the end of Christianity and its replacement by a "Church-of the-Overman," a rational religion based on the evolutionary principle and advocating physical culture--had been conceived as an artistic work that Shiel would write "without the incentive of serial publication" (Shiel to Richards, [March 1899]).[26] When it became clear to Shiel that he must, out of financial necessity, make it amenable to serialization he tried to adapt it to that form. Still, it was too *risqué* for the periodicals who objected to its "agnostic tone" and did not publish it (Shiel to Richards, 11 February 1900). As a novel, it would not be published until 1906 and this "church-cursing book," as Shiel called it, was, according to him, one of his worst-selling novels (Shiel to Richards, 24th October 1913).

Another novel was abandoned by Shiel because of the difficulty faced in getting a story published which he had been told by Ward Lock was unpublishable by virtue of the "decadent" relation between two men contained in it (Shiel to Richards, 15 October 1913). Later in his career, when he no longer relied on and/or was no longer able to obtain contracts for serialization, Shiel would become more invested in the intellectual and philosophical content of his works, causing Richards to ask him to omit over one hundred pages of "metaphysical, philosophical, scientific harangues" from his manuscript for *How the Old Woman Got Home* (1927): "Excellent sense, I take it," he wrote Shiel, "but very forbidding to the romantic reader" (Richards to Shiel, 13 May 1925).

Though Shiel may ultimately have been more successful at popularizing his work than was fellow former decadent writer, John Davidson (also published by Richards), it was no doubt Shiel's attempt to resolve the irresolvable tensions between high and popular art that prevented him from being either a massively successful best-seller like Marie Corelli or Rider Haggard or an acclaimed modernist literary avant-garde of the "men of 1914" variety like James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, and Ford Madox Ford.

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[26] There are certain similarities between Nietzsche's philosophy and the themes of Shiel's books. Brian Stableford says that these similarities are merely superficial, however, and he argues that "the moral philosophies of Shiel and Nietzsche are actually polar opposites" ("Politics" 382). Whereas Nietzsche's philosophy of the *übermensch* was highly individualist and his *übermensch* are rare, Shiel is a moral collectivist and his "overmen are already among us, and . . . can be created relatively easily" ("Politics" 383). Similarly, whereas Nietzsche despised Christ's teachings, Shiel "thought it was time for a higher moral consciousness to be placed upon them" ("Politics" 383).

Instead, Shiel was a rather marginal figure in both the Edwardian and Modernist periods. The genres he wrote in prevented him from gaining wider recognition among the literary élite of whom only a few appreciated his literary artistry. Similarly, his appeal among the popular audience was relatively small in comparison with other writers of popular fiction because, according to many reviewers of the time, his style proved a hindrance to the average reader.

Nothing better illustrates both Shiel's marginal position within the Edwardian literary field and the tensions involved in his attempts to mediate between "high" and "low" art than the publication of his critical essay "On Reading." It is not so much the content of the essay that reveals these tensions but rather the context. The essay appeared not in the pages of any of the prominent literary periodicals of the time nor as a published volume on its own (as had Machen's *Hieroglyphics*) but rather as a foreword to his novel *This Knot of Life* (1909). The essay, which precedes a sensational tale of intrigue, misadventure, and betrayal involving a hidden stash of money, details Shiel's philosophy of reading and writing as it has evolved since his publication of "Premier and Maker" in *Shapes in the Fire*.

The essay takes up the questions of why read, what to read, and in what way to read and is followed by a discussion of great writing. The irony of his serious critical musings with lengthy, elaborate, digressive, and philosophical footnotes appearing in the pages of a popular novel is apparently not lost on Shiel who addresses his essay in letter form to a Mrs. Meade of Kensington and, tangentially, her neighbours the ladies of Kensington--uneducated readers, according to him, who represent the readers of popular works of which his novel is one. Shiel's stance here differs from that of his prefatory note in *Shapes in the Fire* of twelve years earlier in which he also addresses the book to a female reader--Beatrice Laws. In this earlier instance, Shiel tells his female reader to skip the philosophical critical discussion that forms the interlude of his series of tales. It is a "piece" for the "male reader" and will be "dull" to her (vi). In the preface to his 1909 novel, however, there is no longer evidence of this male reader and Shiel is left having to share his philosophy with the women of Kensington whom he clearly looks down upon. He denigrates the reading habits of these women whom he declares have not "reached expertness" in reading (9). He condemns reading as a means of "whiling away the time" and looks down upon publications like *Tit-Bits* and *Answers* and the novels of writers like Corelli and Rita (9, 16, 17). Though these comments are generalized criticisms not specifically directed at women, his overall address to Mrs. Meade and her Kensington neighbour ladies and his targeting of women writers suggest that Shiel views women as the main perpetrators of bad reading habits and tastes.

In this respect, Shiel's views correspond faithfully to the sexist views of female readership and authorship prevalent in the 1880s and 1890s when Shiel was beginning his career. In other respects, however, his critical ideas differ substantially from the Paterian aesthetic and decadent high artistic ethos of the 1890s, one that his contemporary Machen had continued to espouse with a modified symbolist emphasis in *Hieroglyphics*. Shiel's philosophy, like Davidson's, was strongly pro-science and anti-aesthetic and therefore, according to him, "modern" (37).[27] The "duty" of the modern reader, he says, "is to be studious in science" and in modern philosophy (37). He condemns most men who consider themselves writers and views scientists as "better than half the roll of those who have thought themselves writers" and more capable of producing "a book truer, shrewder, closer to the core of Being, than the whole mass and scrap-heap of fiction-books yet scribbled by man" (23, 20). In addition, his view of the reception of literary work is couched in scientific terms. He designates, for example, a very particular nerve centre of the body as the receiver literature--the "nerve-thread" or "commissure . . . which forms the connexion betwixt the visual centre in the brain and the auditory centre (26). Though in its scientific emphasis Shiel's philosophy is akin to Davidson's, it is not as aggressively didactic. The aim of literary art, he declares, is to "enlarge" the "reader's consciousness of the truth of things." At first the reader will "follow and learn" from the writer but eventually she will be able to "converse with" and ultimately "controvert" the writer (37).

Far from being typically *fin de siècle* or even Edwardian, Shiel's literary philosophy in many aspects anticipates Modernist ideas that would be espoused by Ezra Pound years later in his essays "How to Read" (1927 or 1928) and "The Serious Artist" (1913). Like Shiel, Pound likens literary criticism to science and the work of the artist as scientific ("How to Read" 19; "The Serious Artist" 46). Both writers advocate less rather than more reading with Shiel declaring that even if one read only the best it would still be too much and Pound suggesting reading "fewer [books] with greater result" (Shiel, "On Reading" 14; Pound "How to Read" 16). Similarly, echoing Shiel on the aim of literary art, Pound declares that art must be "true to human consciousness" and that art is "useful" insofar as it "maintains the precision and clarity of thought, not merely for the benefit of a few dilettantes and 'lovers of literature', but [also] the health of thought outside literary circles and in non-literary existence, in general, individual, and communal life" ("How to Read" 22).

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[27] Indeed, Shiel declares Davidson along with Shaw and Wells to be one among only a handful of "educated consciousnesses" of the time and, in a digressive footnote, embarks on an imaginary discussion between Davidson and William Archer in which Davidson defends himself against the criticisms of Archer (38-9).

But despite the intellectual seriousness of Shiel's views and the affinity of these views with later modernist thought, Shiel's status as a writer of popular serialized fiction made him invisible to the modernists. So too, he was silent throughout the heyday of high modernism, publishing nothing between 1914 and 1923, his only known literary activity being the writing of plays--none of which seem to have ever been produced or published.[28] Save for Virginia Woolf, the supporters of Shiel's Civil List Pension application of 1935 represent those who, in canonical terms, would now be regarded as a B-list of writers and critics of the period, people like Edward Shanks, J. C. Squire, G. K. Chesterton, Lascelles Abercrombie, and others scorned by the high modernists. Even Woolf's support is not without qualification. She altered the wording of the form letter from "It would not be too much to say that he has enriched literature" to read "he has enriched literature" (Woolf, letter to Civil List Pension Board). And though Rebecca West compared Shiel's "palpitant style" to that of James Joyce in a 1931 review (West, press clipping from *Daily Telegraph*), Shiel never attracted the notice of the high Modernist literary élite.

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[28] Shiel's activities during these years are difficult to trace. He spent about 18 months in prison and is also said to have served as a translator during the war. He married in about 1918 and may have been well enough off through his wife's money to try his hand at play-writing for a while.1918 and may have been well enough off through his wife's money to try his hand at play-writing for a while.

Like Machen, however, Shiel experienced a minor vogue in America and, to a lesser extent, in England in the 1920s and 1930s, profiting from the same interest in *fin de siècle* writers that had sparked Machen's comeback. Dashiell Hammett was a fan and called Shiel "a magician" (qtd. in Herron 179). Carl Van Vechten, who had been introduced to Shiel's works by English novelist Hugh Walpole, was responsible for bringing Shiel to publisher Alfred Knopf's attention in 1923, describing Shiel to Knopf as a "commercial proposition" and "an important . . . artist" sure of "popular" and "critical success" (*Letters* 56). The timing of the American Knopf publications (they published Shiel's new novel, the Haggardesque *Children of the Wind* and a revised edition of his 1901 novel *Lord of the Sea*) was good as it corresponded with Shiel's return to the literary field after having been absent for many years. *Lord of the Sea* was published by Knopf in the Borzoi pocket book series which Knopf advertised as "popular edition[s] of some of the best books of our own and other ages." Knopf, however, did not continue with his plan to publish a series of Shiel novels as he had done with Machen and most of the remainder of Shiel's American publications were published by the radical Vanguard Press, a firm which was committed to producing "inexpensive books which would spread . . . the idea of social justice" (Murray 364). In England in 1929 Victor Gollancz published five of Shiel's earlier works in a uniform series. Plans by Gollancz to publish all Shiel's works in a uniform series, however, fell through.

Shiel continued producing works until his death in 1947. He was still revising works of his earlier period for new audiences, turning his novels into novelettes and compiling a book of critical work (including a revised version of "On Reading") which would be published posthumously as *Science, Life and Literature*. For some of this period, Shiel was less reliant on hack work, possibly because of his second wife's money. Nonetheless, he was still writing in popular genres that were considered low art and his reputation never went beyond those of his select few admirers among the literary élite and the unknown thousands who bought his works for their popular appeal.

Shiel was far more successful in shedding his image as a "decadent" than were his contemporaries Davidson, Dowson, and Machen, even though there was something of a continuity in Shiel's florid, exuberant, exotic, eccentric, mannered, and peculiar style between its origins in his decadent work and his later works. He was able to take his stylistic affectation and put it to use in decidedly undecadent twentieth-century popular forms. As a result, he receives more recognition as an Edwardian writer and as a science fiction and detective writer than as a *fin de siècle* decadent type. Like Machen, Shiel was a writer who appealed to literary connoisseurs of a certain type, connoisseurs like Carl Van Vechten who prided themselves on their "knowledge of the byways and crannies of exotic literature" (Carl Van Vechten, "Matthew Phipps Shiel" 149). Similarly Shiel and his works defy classification in a way that resembles the case of Machen. With Shiel, we are also bound to ask whether he is a "high" writer of "low" art or a "low" writer of "high" art and to question whether this liminal status, this unclassifiability is responsible for the absence of writers like Machen and Shiel in canonical literary histories and the histories of popular literature. So too, the unclassifiability or "generic promiscuity" of these writers particularly of Shiel who wrote in so many genres, may account for their critical neglect in the tradition of literary history that privileges consistency (Kemp, Mitchell, Trotter xvii). Writers like Davidson and Dowson have also been subject to traditional literary history's desire for consistency, though in a different respect than Machen and Shiel. Seen as important forerunners of modernism, literary histories have tended to regularize and to make consistent the literary activities of Dowson and Davidson by focusing on the poetry of these writers rather than on the novels, plays, and testaments that complicate and make erratic their positions within the "tradition."

Conclusion

Decadence as aristocratic, decadence as working-class, decadence as bohemian, decadence as middle-class, decadence as high art, decadence as popular art, decadence as effeminate, decadence as hyper-masculine, decadence as a regenerative influence on the novel, decadence as degenerate and pernicious, decadence as realistic and true to late nineteenth-century culture, decadence as abnormal and therefore unrealistic, the decadent as cultured, the decadent as uneducated and degenerate, the decadent as dilettante, the decadent as professional, the decadent as martyr to art, the decadent as "producer." These are just some of the contradictory characteristics that were applied to decadence in the British *fin de siècle.* My dissertation has been an attempt to trace the development of and to account for the variety of meanings accorded to decadence in the British *fin de siècle* period. To engage with these contradictory representations, it has been necessary to regard decadence not as the fully autonomous sphere that decadents claim for it, but to understand the social, historical, and cultural conditions that fostered the variety of meanings accorded to decadence within the *fin de siècle*. At the same time, I have sought to challenge the dominant stereotypes and myths of decadence, to show that these myths and stereotypes obscure the way in which decadence was the site of a conflict over meaning in the 1880s and 1890s. In many respects, the myth of the decadent as aristocrat, the myth of decadence as an élite high art, and the myth of the tragic generation privilege the decadent representation of decadence by conferring on decadence the high art status that would ensure the cultural authority of its proponents, by obscuring the middle-class origins of the decadents, and by endorsing the romantic image of the decadent as a martyr to art in the face of a hostile and philistine social and cultural climate. These myths are challenged substantially when we take into consideration alternative representations of decadence as working class and middle-class, as popular art, and when we examine the decadents not in light of their tragic lives but rather in light of their productive careers as writers engaged in the literary field in diverse ways.

In examining representations of decadence I have not set out to privilege one set of meanings over another, replacing the pro-decadent idealistic artistic representation with the cynical representation that undermines it. Instead, I have placed these contradictory representations in relation to one another, creating a "dialectical history" that emphasizes these representations as strategic "fictions" designed by various participants in the literary field to serve particular ends. Such histories, argues Peter McDonald in his study of the literary field of the 1880-1914 period, "insist . . . that avant-garde and 'popular' culture are reciprocally defined in and through an ongoing cultural contest. . . . it is the reciprocal antagonisms that exist between them and the hierarchically structured networks that make each possible" (173). In this dissertation I have demonstrated the important role played by decadence in this ongoing cultural contest at a crucial moment in literary history which marked the origin of what Huyssen has called the "great divide" between high and mass or popular art (vii). By demonstrating how representations of decadence functioned in the construction of an artistic identity for writers of all kinds in the 1880 and 1890s and how decadence furthered debates about aesthetics, ethics, high culture, popular culture, and the dominant definition of writer, my dissertation has insisted that decadence must be understood as emerging from the "reciprocal antagonisms" of agents within the literary field (not only antagonisms between élite and the popular as McDonald has described but also antagonisms within the élite). I have also insisted in the dissertation on the culturally specific nature of British decadence and, while acknowledging the influence of French decadent literature on the British decadents, I have also tried to indicate how decadence in Britain was shaped in the context of its own particular social, cultural, and literary realities.

To this end, I have, in Part 1 of the dissertation, provided an account of the British socio-cultural origins of the decadent and have considered how the particular conditions of the literary field in the 1880s and 1890s shaped a specifically British form of decadence. This part of the dissertation also engages with the myths of the decadent as aristocrat and the decadent as bohemian and begins the work of challenging the status of decadence as avant-garde. In the first chapter, I have demonstrated how attitudes and ideas that would come to be labelled decadent in Britain were a product of a specific social situation: the rift between the professional and business middle class in the mid-Victorian period. What I have described in Part 1, Chapter 1 as the "decadent sensibility" was one response to this rift. Adopted by the sons of professionals, this decadent sensibility, which drew in a superficial manner on the values and ideals of the upper and working classes, was an effort to obscure their real class origins, to distinguish themselves from the entrepreneurial middle class but also from the professional middle class which the decadents regarded as in collusion with the bourgeois middle class.

In Chapter 2 of this part of the dissertation I have also described the emergence of decadence as a function of the particular conditions of the British literary field and as part of an ongoing debate within the field about the state of English fiction. Decadence, an aesthetic that insisted on the autonomy of art, emerged as a response to what was perceived by the decadents as an increasingly commercialized literary field. Furthermore, the decadent aesthetic was offered by its proponents as a solution to what many agreed was a crisis in the history of English literature. As debates about how writers might go about re-invigorating English fiction, decadence became a central focus and conflicting views regarding it began to emerge as the decadents, other writers among the literary élite, and popular writers engaged in a battle for cultural authority to assert the dominant definition of writer. If decadents regarded decadence as an invigorating influence on an enfeebled English fiction, its opponents, by contrast, regarded it as a degenerative influence. In this section, I have also described how material realities impinged on the artistic ideals of the decadents. While decadents may have striven for a fully autonomous aesthetic sphere, they were subject to the pressures of their own financial needs and a desire to establish themselves as writers, the conditions of publishing and the demands of the literary marketplace with the limits it set on the purview of fiction. These conditions made it necessary for decadents to mediate between their own artistic ideals and the demands of the marketplace.

In Part 2 of the dissertation, I have provided an account of the development of discourses and counter-discourses of decadence at various points from their emergence in the 1880s up until the Wilde trial in the 1890s. I have argued that both types of discourses must be understood as developments of the debates about aestheticism and naturalism in Britain at this time. At the same time, I have provided a wide sampling of texts that engage with decadence from the work of Vernon Lee and George Moore which anticipates the emergence of the decadent type, to the counter-decadent fiction of Marie Corelli and Sarah Grand to the "decadent" fiction of Ernest Dowson, John Davidson, Arthur Machen and M. P. Shiel. My consideration of these texts reveals the importance of viewing decadence as an integral part of an ongoing cultural contest within the literary field. As I have argued, these texts clearly engage in strategic ways in artistic debates about the purview of fiction, the function of the artist, and the qualities that define high and popular art. So too, these texts, in their mobilization of notions of the popular and of élite art in their representations of decadence, clearly demonstrate McDonald's claim that the "avant-garde and 'popular' culture are reciprocally defined in and through an ongoing cultural contest. . . . [and that] it is the reciprocal antagonisms that exist between them and the hierarchically structured networks that make each possible" (173). In this contest decadents were forced to contend with the popular and popular writers were forced to contend with decadence as they attempted to further their own artistic agendas in a literary field characterized on the one hand by its privileging of high art aesthetics and, on the other, by its increasingly commercialized nature. This section furthers my demystification of the myth of decadence as élite high art by demonstrating the degree to which decadence was implicated in popular culture, not only because it was taken up by popular writers and the press and was often described in terms of trashy popular literature in these venues but also, more significantly, because decadents mediated between high and popular art in the production of their fiction.

I have given significant attention to the demystification of the myth of the tragic generation in Part 3 because, even with all the scholarly materialist criticism of this period, the decadents and decadence still get short shrift. As I have indicated in the introduction, materialist studies to date have tended to contrast the productive engagement of aestheticism with literary, cultural, and social issues with a demonized and reductive representation of decadence. In this section, then, I have felt it important to provide an alternative to the narrative of the tragic generation by demonstrating how the decadents continued to engage in the post-decadent literary fields. I have also felt it necessary in this section to re-visit the frequently espoused connection between decadence and modernism by analysing the position of decadence within the literary field of the modernist era. While modernists acknowledged their debts to the decadents late in their careers after the age of high modernism, the conditions of the field in the modernist era, as I argue, made it necessary for modernists to disavow the decadents in that particular cultural moment.

In its demystification of the predominant myths and stereotypes of decadence, my dissertation has expanded the purview of and opened up new avenues of enquiry for future studies of decadence. While many critics often conflate decadence with aestheticism or approach the idea of literary decadence in the British context with some trepidation based, no doubt, on the sense that decadence was not a major force in England because, as Freedman notes, "no Englishman was inclined (or able) fully to imitate their French counterpart," I have argued for a culturally-specific form of decadence and have insisted on its distinction from aestheticism (36). I have also attempted to disentangle decadence from the negative stereotypes or what Freedman calls the "cultural baggage" (203) that other critics like Constable, Potolsky, and Denisoff claim have plagued studies of decadence. Given the overwhelming sense in the period itself that there was a literary decadence, we need, I think, to be able to account for what constituted this perceived decadence and this means putting aside standard literary concepts of decadence and attending to notions of decadence as they were understood and constructed within the *fin de siècle* itself. In taking into account the contemporary reception of literature in the period in which fiction was more controversial in relation to decadence than was poetry, I have given fiction a central place in a literary history of decadence that tends to privilege poetry. In so doing, I have recuperated writers like Machen and Shiel, indicating how these writers, neglected from the decadent canon, might be written into a broader history of decadence.

I have also stressed the importance of particular British literary influences on the decadents though not writers like Walter Pater, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Algernon Charles Swinburne who have been traditionally viewed as influences on British decadent writers. Instead, I have focused on George Moore's important role in attempting to bring decadence to the English novel, a role that was acknowledged at the time by Havelock Ellis and Arthur Symons but which has been largely overlooked in critical histories of decadence until now. So too, I have indicated the importance of writers like George Meredith and Robert Louis Stevenson to the decadents for whom these writers stood as models of how to mediate between high and popular art. Certainly more work could be done to bring to light these and other more mainstream literary influences on the decadents and the connections between the works of writers like Meredith and Stevenson and the writings of the decadents.

In bringing a sceptical eye to the decadents' claims of aesthetic autonomy, I have indicated the importance of the less avant-garde productions of writers like Davidson and Dowson in a history of literary decadence. I have also insisted on the importance of balancing the myth of the tragic generation in which decadents figure as martyrs to art and isolated figures in a philistine world largely unsympathetic to high art with an account of the active, engaged, productive, and diverse literary careers that are revealed in their correspondence with their literary peers and their publishers. This scepticism regarding the aesthetic autonomy of decadence has made possible the uncovering of a body of decadent work which mediates between high and popular art, works like those of Machen and Shiel that have been left out of histories of decadence because they do not conform to traditional ideas about decadence. My examination of this work has indicated the degree to which decadence was shaped by the conditions of production and reception and argues for the necessity of seeing decadence in relation to a contest and/or mediation between high and popular art. By foregrounding the engagement of decadence with the popular, I have indicated the possibility of constructing an alternative to the decadent/high modernist literary genealogy, one that emphasizes the connections between *fin de siècle* decadence and the popular and pulp genres of the twentieth century. Though I have not traced this genealogy to any considerable degree in my last chapter, focusing in more general terms on the twentieth-century careers of Machen and Shiel, these writers would figure significantly in possible future studies along these lines. Furthermore, in challenging the aesthetic autonomy of decadence as well as the notion that decadence is the exclusive property of the literary élite, I have argued for the importance of considering the appropriation and construction of decadence by counter-decadents and non-decadents like Marie Corelli, Robert Hichens, Vernon Lee, Sarah Grand and those critics who responded to decadence in reviews and articles.

Decadence viewed from these perspectives, my dissertation has argued, looks substantially different both from its idealized form as an autonomous, élite art produced by disinterested martyrs to art and also from its demonized form as degenerate, solipsistic art form that created in its wake what T. S. Eliot once described as "some untidy lives" ("Arnold and Pater" 392). I have, in this dissertation, brought these and other competing fictions of decadence into relation, examining them as they were constructed in the particular social, literary, cultural, and historical context of *fin de siècle* Britain. In so doing, my intention has been to construct a materialist history of decadence that acknowledges the active, dynamic, and engaged ways in which the decadents participated in the culture of their time.

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